

WORLD NO TOBACCO DAY 2009

THEME: TOBACCO HEALTH WARNINGS

Tobacco is the leading preventable cause of death. More than five million people die from the effects of tobacco every year — more than from HIV/AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis combined. It is the only legal consumer product that kills when used exactly as the manufacturer intends. Up to half of all smokers will die from a tobacco-related disease. Second-hand smoke harms everyone who is exposed to it.

Tobacco companies spend tens of millions of dollars every year turning new users into addicts and keeping current users from quitting. Through advertising and promotional campaigns, including the use of carefully crafted package designs, the tobacco industry continues to divert attention from the deadly effects of its products.

More and more countries are fighting back by requiring that tobacco packages graphically show the dangers of tobacco, as called for in the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control. They use the MPOWER technical assistance package developed by WHO to meet their commitments under this international treaty.

Effective health warnings, especially those that include pictures, have been proven to motivate users to quit and to reduce the appeal of tobacco for those who are not yet addicted. Despite this fact, 9 out of 10 people live in countries that do not require warnings with pictures on tobacco packages.

Nicotine is a highly addictive substance. Warning people about its true risks can go a long way towards reducing tobacco addiction. Requiring warnings on tobacco packages is a simple, cheap and effective strategy that can vastly reduce tobacco use and save lives. Now is the time to act.

- The focus
- Call for action



THE FOCUS:

Most people are unaware of the extent of the harm that tobacco causes, even if they have some idea that it is a health risk.

Tobacco companies use packaging and other advertising techniques to make tobacco appealing, while distracting consumers from the harsh reality of how tobacco destroys health.

It is a proven fact that warnings on packaging are an inexpensive and powerful way to show the truth about tobacco consumption. Warnings that include images of the harm that tobacco causes are particularly effective at communicating risk and motivating behavioural changes, such as quitting or reducing tobacco consumption. Picture warnings convey a clear and immediate message, even to people who cannot read. They reduce the overall attractiveness of tobacco packages — an important function for a product whose new users are typically young and image- and brand-conscious.

In response to this threat and the demand from countries for action, the World No Tobacco Day 2009 campaign focuses on the following main message:

Health warnings on tobacco packages that combine text and pictures are one of the most cost-effective ways to increase public awareness of the serious health risks of tobacco use and to reduce tobacco consumption.

Why do we need to campaign for picture-based health warnings on all tobacco packages?

Because they have been found to work in countries that have required their use. For example:

- In Canada, 58% of smokers said the warnings made them think more about the health effects of smoking.
- In Brazil, 67% of smokers said the warnings made them want to quit, and 54% said they made them change their opinion about the health consequences of smoking.
- In Singapore, 28% of smokers said the warnings made them smoke fewer cigarettes, and one out of six said they avoided smoking in front of children as a result of the warnings.
- In Thailand, 44% of smokers said the warnings made them "a lot" more likely to quit over the next month, and 53% said they made them think "a lot" about the health risks.



CALL FOR ACTION:

PLACING PICTURE WARNINGS ON ALL TOBACCO PRODUCTS IS AN APPROPRIATE AND HIGHLY COST-EFFECTIVE WAY TO WARN CONSUMERS ABOUT THE RISKS OF TOBACCO AND TO REDUCE TOBACCO CONSUMPTION

Call to policy-makers:

- Promote your country's accession to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, whose Article 11 guidelines lay out the elements of effective tobacco health warnings. More than 160 countries are already Parties to this international treaty.
- Use the MPOWER package — specifically, the "W", which stands for "Warn about the dangers of tobacco" — to counter the tobacco epidemic and to help countries meet their commitments under the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control.
- Require by law that all tobacco products display large picture warnings about the harm caused by tobacco and its many other negative consequences.
- Build on the experiences of other countries to craft the most effective warnings and implement them for the greatest possible impact.
- Base your decisions on impartial scientific evidence, not on the claims of the tobacco industry. Tobacco companies oppose strong health warnings, particularly those with pictures. The arguments they use against health warnings are false and should not be relied upon.

Call to civil society and nongovernmental organizations:

- Advocate for picture-based warnings on all tobacco products.
- Campaign for and help to develop and implement laws that require picture-based warnings on tobacco products.
- Act as a watchdog to monitor tobacco-industry packaging strategies and compliance with statutory warnings.
- Evaluate and share information about the effectiveness of picture warnings.

Call to the public:

- Demand your right to know the truth — the whole truth — about the dangers of tobacco use and exposure to second-hand tobacco smoke.
- Let everyone know that you support picture warnings.

