

10 Jan 2017

Dear Sir/Madam,

Opposition to your "Proposal to amend the health warnings on packets and retail containers of tobacco products"

I write to express my concern about your absurd "Proposal to amend the health warnings on packets and retail containers of tobacco products." I'm not a smoker and still find enlarging the health warning on cigarette packets disturbing and hampering the free economy in Hong Kong.

Enlarging the graphic warning on the package does not help at all in discouraging people from smoking. Smokers still smoke regardless how ugly you mandate the package to look. Such a simple graphic can absolutely not deter existing smokers. You might be targeting the potential smokers but then, with the applaudable effort made by the Department of Health/ COSH, anti-smoking messages including the harm might be caused by smoking are very well conveyed. I'm sure people make rational choices on whether to smoke or not. So why not give them the freedom to choose a product that looks decent?

The ineffective proposal also refrain information from being clearly revealed on the package. With as much as 85% of the package area blocked by the warning graphic, there will barely be sufficient space for the tobacco brand to state necessary details, like their brand name, product composition, flavour, etc. From a consumer's perspective, how could one differentiate between different brands and products? This deprives consumers' right of choosing their preferred tobacco product. In turn, price and maybe word-of-mouth will in turn become the only factor(s) for them to consider. This clearly sabotages Hong Kong's long-standing principle of free economy.

Naturally irregulated illicit cigarettes are what follows. When the majority of the cigarettes in the market look largely (or literally largely) the same, owing to the 85% graphic warning, trademarks of the tobacco companies might not be clearly displayed and it becomes easier to fake the cigarettes. With the regular sales of legal tobacco companies disturbed, not only would the tobacco tax revenue shrink, Hong Kong's good name of Asia's World City committing to protecting intellectual property right would also be flawed. Let's not be too obsessed to the believe that graphic warning could effectively deter smokers. It simply doesn't make sense putting the rationale into other goods. Excessive alcohol or sugar or salt intake would as well cause disturbance and add medical burden to society. So why only do the graphic warning to cigarettes and leave out the others?

It is understood that smoking could be harmful to smokers' and non-smokers' health and induce huge medical burden to the public health domain. However, only with the right approach could the problem be addressed in rightfully and effectively, and inducing the least harm to other aspects or fields. It is a new year ahead and I hope the authority would consider not go forward with such a disturbing and ineffective initiative.

Regards,

Rosamund Lee

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