

Submission from Ms Grace CHANG

Submission on the New Graphic Health Warning on Cigarette Packaging

I acknowledge that the Food and Health Bureau and the Tobacco Control Office of the Department of Health has proposed the area of the graphic health warning to be of a size that covers at least 85% of the two largest surfaces of the packet or the retail container; to increase the number of forms of health warning from six to 12; and to incorporate the health warning messages together with the existing "HKSAR GOVERNMENT WARNING"- "QUIT SMOKING FOR FUTURE GENERATIONS" and "QUITLINE: 1833 183".

The government, anti-smoking organisations and the non-smokers generally believe that plain packaging reduces the attractiveness of tobacco products and is a significant demand reduction measure. However, as a smoker of 10 years, I do not think it will stop me from buying and smoking cigarettes. First of all, I have the habit of taking all the cigarettes from the original paper box and putting them into my personal steel cigarettes box. The only time I see the image on the box is at the moment of the purchase and I will throw it away. I do not see how the enlarged image will remind me of the so called harmful effects of tobacco as the box never stays in my pocket. I definitely do not pay attention to the warnings on the package and I do ignore them intentionally. This is also the reason for putting them in a cigarettes holder as I do not want to carry some disgusting images around and showing that to others.

Second, I think what's happening with the tobacco warning labels is that they have become part of the "trade dress" of cigarette brands. People who do not use a cigarettes holder like I do, have been exposing to the warning labels many times per day for years has become part of the smoking experience. Do graphic warning labels actually prevent people from starting to smoke? Do they cause current smokers to quit? The answers are far from clear, because there's little evidence for the effect of graphic warning labels on smoking initiation or cessation. There are estimates of the potential impact but almost no direct evidence for an actual effect on smoking. In fact, there's reason to believe graphic warning labels might have the opposite effect, making smokers feel defensive or causing nonsmokers to become inattentive to anti-smoking messages.

In a recent ruling against the use of graphic warning labels, the U.S. Court of Appeals was blunt in its assessment of this literature:

"The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has not provided a shred of evidence ... showing that the graphic warnings will 'directly advance' its interest in reducing the number of Americans who smoke."

I totally agree with the statement. As a smoker, I do not see how the New Graphic Health Warning on Cigarette Packaging could prevent smokers from continuing their habit of 10 to 20 years. If the warnings are effective, I believe a lot of smokers would have quit and smoking will not be a huge issue to the governments around the world. I believe we smokers have the right to make our own decisions, quit or not to quit, and the 85% graphic image will further take away our freedom of making choices and it is unfair to the smoking population when comparing with drinking alcohol which is the same harmful as smoking.

I hope the government will reconsider the amendments as they are not effective and will turn out be a waste of time and effort. I suggest the government to put more effort on education instead of investing in the bottomless anti-smoking campaigns which target the smoking population.