

Tobacco Displays at the Point of Sale

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Tobacco displays attract new young smokers

Since the introduction of tobacco advertising bans, tobacco companies have become increasingly reliant on displays at the point of sale to attract attention to their products and stimulate sales. The main purpose of tobacco marketing is to attract new smokers since established smokers tend to be brand loyal.

Each year thousands of children and young people in the United Kingdom start smoking, with around two-thirds starting before the age of 18.¹ Every year 340,000 children under sixteen try cigarettes for the first time.² The younger a person starts smoking the greater the risk of getting lung cancer and other smoking related diseases.³ Because nicotine is so addictive, only around half of all smokers manage to stop smoking before they die.⁴

Research shows that Point of Sale (PoS) display has a direct impact on young people's smoking. In 2006, almost half (46%) of UK teenagers were aware of tobacco display at PoS and those professing an intention to smoke were more likely to recall brands that they had seen at the point of sale.⁵



A longitudinal study in the US found that teenagers who visited convenience stores with tobacco displays were more likely to start smoking,⁶ while similar research with 25,000 young people in New Zealand found that children exposed to displays were almost three times more likely to smoke.⁷ Research has found that young people believe that displays encourage smoking and are considered "cool, fun and attractive".⁸ Similarly research in Australia⁹ and the USA¹⁰ has shown that point of sale display advertising of cigarettes normalises tobacco use for children and creates a perception that tobacco is easily obtainable.

The current legal position in the UK

The Health Act 2009¹¹ included measures to protect children from tobacco including the prohibition of the display of tobacco products at the point of sale in England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The Act followed a widespread consultation on the future of tobacco control that received over 100,000 (mostly positive) responses.¹² Over 50,000 people also signed a Cancer Research UK petition in support of the ban on point of sale display.

Healthy Lives, Healthy People: A Tobacco Control Plan for England,¹³ published in March 2011, included a commitment to implement point of sale legislation in England in large shops from April 2012 and in smaller shops from April 2015.

The Health Act also granted the Northern Ireland Assembly and the Welsh Assembly Government powers to introduce similar regulations. The Northern Ireland Assembly consultation on draft regulations ended on 24 December 2010.¹⁴ In Wales, a consultation on draft regulations ended on 6 July 2010.¹⁵

In Scotland, the Tobacco and Primary Medical Services (Scotland) Act was due to end point of sale displays in large stores from October 2011 and in small stores from October 2013. However, following an ongoing legal challenge, implementation of the ban has been delayed. The Government is currently working towards implementation from April 1, 2012 for large retailers and from April 1, 2015 for small retailers. A revised timetable for implementing the tobacco display ban in Scotland will be published following conclusion of the legal challenge.¹⁶

Tobacco display is a form of advertising

The main reason for prohibiting the display of tobacco products at the point of sale is to protect children and young people from the promotion of tobacco. Most forms of tobacco advertising are now banned in the UK following the implementation of the Tobacco Advertising and Promotion Act (TAPA) 2002. In December 2004 regulations were put in place limiting tobacco advertising at the point of sale to an area equivalent to the surface of a single A5 sized poster, with 30% of the area taken up by a health warning.

Children and young people are particularly influenced by tobacco imagery^{17,18} and the effectiveness of tobacco advertising in recruiting children to smoking is the primary reason behind legislation banning such promotion. In the words of Secretary of State for Health, Andrew Lansley “*It’s wrong that children are being attracted to smoke by glitzy designs on packets.*”¹⁹

Although the TAPA includes regulatory authority to ban displays, there are currently no regulations in place. Tobacco companies have exploited this loophole and since 2003 there has been considerable growth in the number and size of tobacco displays in many premises.^{20,21} Examples include the use of clocks and specially-designed towers to highlight specific brands. Other tactics include the use of back-lighting of gantries (shelving) and eye-catching non-standard shelving to make the brands stand out.²²



As can be seen from these images, the cigarette packs themselves are now the main form of cigarette advertising and the distinction between advertising and display has become blurred. [See also [ASH Briefing on Plain Packaging](#) - pdf file]

The following comments highlight the importance of the pack as a communication tool:

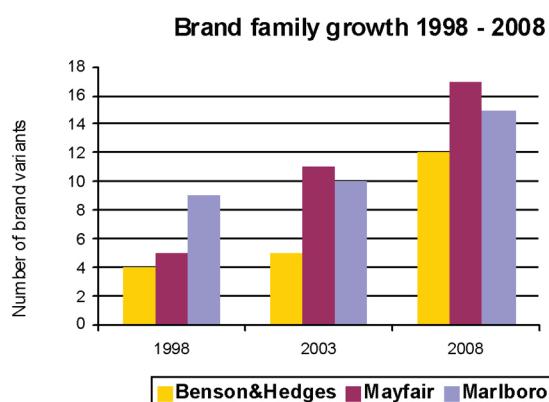
"It is the communication life-blood of the firm... the silent salesman"²⁴

"It is a promotional tool in its own right"²⁵

"It is a total opportunity for communications... a carefully planned brand or information communications campaign"²⁶

Growth of 'brand families'

One way in which tobacco companies have succeeded in increasing point of sale exposure of their brands is by developing new variants of existing brands. Since 1998 brand families have grown in size by more than 50% with popular brands such as Benson & Hedges increasing brand variants from 4 in 1998 to 12 by 2008. The increase in brand variants is designed to maximise their visual impact on shop shelves.



The graph demonstrates the growth in cigarette brand variants between 1998 and 2008. Mayfair's brand family grew from 5 in 1998 to 17 in 2008. Growth in brand variants allows tobacco companies to maximise their marketing impact through retail displays

Impulse Purchasing

Tobacco marketing is not primarily targeted at existing regular smokers who are extremely brand loyal. Most smokers (86%) always buy the same brand of tobacco and only 6% say their decision about what brand to buy is made on the basis of the shop display.²⁶ Tobacco displays do, however, prompt impulse purchases and increase sales by an estimated 12-28%.²⁷ Young people are particularly likely to make unplanned purchases. Ex-smokers and people who are trying to stop smoking are also vulnerable to these purchases, resulting in relapse.²⁸ The following images are of a large tobacco promotion at a music festival in Wales which was attended by young people.



This innovative tobacco merchandising structure includes a smoking area on the upper level

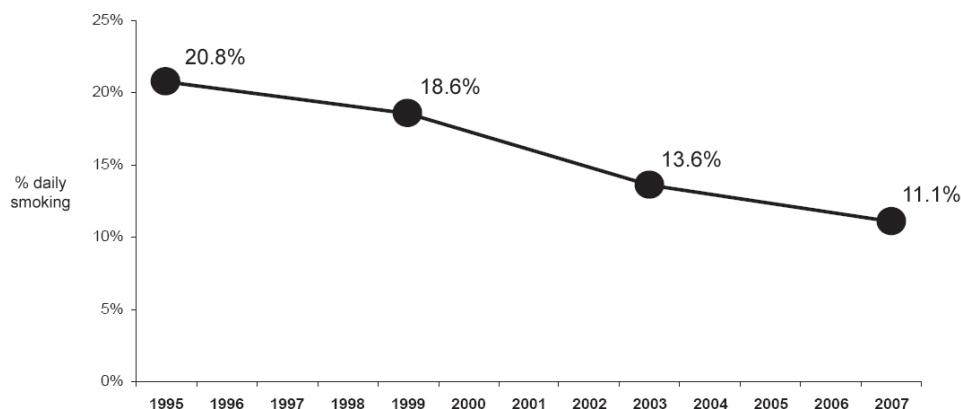


Each 'porthole' contains a packet of cigarettes

Photography by Brendan Cook

Impact of display bans on youth smoking

Jurisdictions that have enforced tobacco point of sale bans as part of a range of tobacco control measures have seen a decrease in smoking prevalence among young people. In Iceland the prevalence of daily smoking among 15 year olds fell from 18.6% in 1999 prior to the cigarette display ban to 13.6% in 2003, two years after the law came into effect and has continued to fall thereafter.²⁹

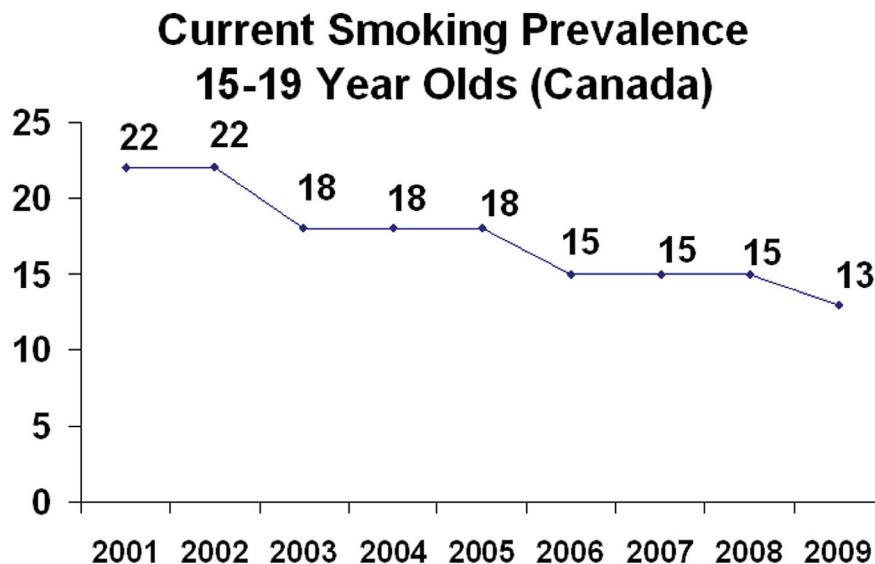


Changes in daily smoking among 15-year old Icelandic students

In Canada, research by the Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey shows that banning point of sale displays in a growing number of provinces has coincided with a fall in smoking prevalence rates amongst 15 to 19 year olds – from 22% in 2002 to 13% in 2009.³⁰ In Ireland, following the implementation of a ban in 2009, teenagers were less likely to believe that they could buy cigarettes³¹ and the proportion of young people believing that more than a fifth of children their age smoked decreased from 62% to 46%.³²

Financial Impact of Point of Sale display bans

Those opposing a ban on the display of tobacco argue that it will have an adverse financial impact on retailers. For example, the Association of Convenience Stores estimates that it will cost retailers £1850 to implement point of sale regulations. However, the costs to retailers could be significantly less if money currently spent by the tobacco industry on in-store shelving and display was used to help retailers comply with any new regulations.



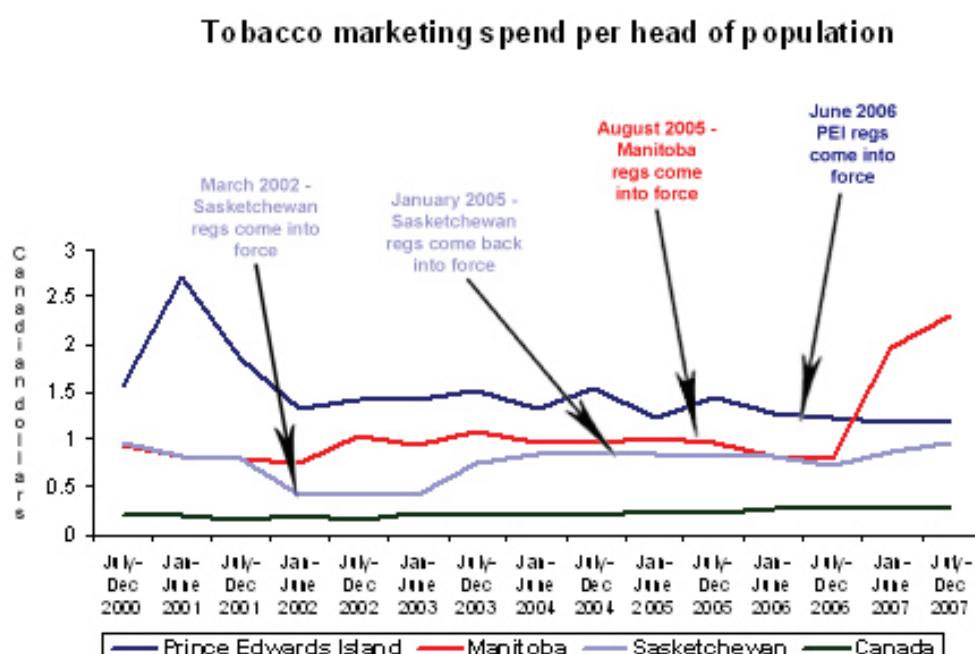
In fact, following the prohibition of tobacco displays in Ireland the UK Association of Convenience Stores found that the average cost of compliance with the legislation was just £300 for those retailers who had to pay, though the industry paid for many stores to convert.³³ Figures from Ireland also show no evidence that retailers suffered any decline in tobacco sales, beyond what might be expected from long-term trends.³⁴

Data from Canada indicate that point of sale display bans have not led to an increase in tobacco smuggling. Canada now has a coast to coast ban on tobacco displays, while improved enforcement has driven down smuggling, therefore increasing the legitimate market by 20%, a trend confirmed by tobacco manufacturing company Phillip Morris International.³⁵

The tobacco industry has a strong interest in ensuring the viability of retail outlets and data from Canada show that cigarette manufacturers have continued to make payments to retailers despite the display bans. In fact the data show that in some provinces tobacco industry payments to retailers increased after the laws were implemented.³⁶

Public Opinion

There is already majority public support for a ban on the display of tobacco products where they are sold. A YouGov survey commissioned by ASH found that 59% of respondents in England said they were in favour whilst just 16% were against the measure.²² A 2010 survey by Cancer Research UK found that this had increased further to 73% support for the removal of point of sale displays.³⁷



Jurisdictions that have banned tobacco displays at the point of sale

Iceland, Thailand, Ireland and Norway have all adopted laws to prohibit the visible display of tobacco products at point of sale, as have all 13 Canadian provinces and territories, the British Virgin Islands, the Australian states of Tasmania, New South Wales, Western Australia, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory and Northern Territory. Finland has also passed legislation that will introduce a ban of point of sale display from January 2012.

Iceland was the first country to implement a tobacco display ban in 2001. The Canadian province of Saskatchewan followed suit in 2002 although this law was challenged by the tobacco industry and was struck down. It was reinstated on appeal in 2005 prompting other provinces to also implement display bans. Thailand implemented its law prohibiting tobacco product displays in 2005. Ireland's legislation came into effect in July 2009 and the Australian Capital Territory in 2010.

Other jurisdictions that are considering tobacco product display bans include New Zealand, Russia and Guernsey and the Australian state of Queensland.

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