

“Tobacco is tobacco – even if it is presented in an appealing way. So we need to take further action to make tobacco less appealing – in particular to young people – and to ensure that people know exactly what they can expect from tobacco in terms of bad health.” according to John Dalli, Commissioner for Health and Consumer Policy (Strengthening EU legislation on tobacco products; SPEECH/12/140. Brussels, 29 February 2012).

As a main result of the EU project Public Information Tobacco Control (PITOC), 16 European countries collaboratively launch websites that inform the public on the general and tobacco industry use of tobacco additives as well as their harmful health effects. These additives are purposely added by tobacco industry, enhance consumer appeal and dependence thus encouraging smoking behaviour. As such, additives increase health hazards associated with tobacco smoking. The information fact sheets that will be disseminated via the websites have been prepared by two key partners, the National Institute for Public Health and the Environment (RIVM), Bilthoven, the Netherlands, and the German Cancer Research Center, (DKFZ), Heidelberg, Germany. In addition, fact presented in the version for professionals provide guidance to policy makers regarding regulation of the contents of tobacco products.

The English originals of the fact sheets are on the web sites of the two key partners,

RIVM (ammonium compounds, sugars, sorbitol, propylene glycol, glycerol, cocoa, furfural and acetaldehyde): www.tabakinfo.nl

DKFZ (menthol, carob bean, cellulose fibre, prune juice, vanillin, guar and licorice): <http://www.dkfz.de/de/tabakkontrolle>

PITOC partners: The Netherlands, Germany, Belgium, Bulgaria, Poland, Rumania, Estland, Malta, Austria, Denmark, United Kingdom, Norway, France, Finland, Republic of Turkey, Switzerland.

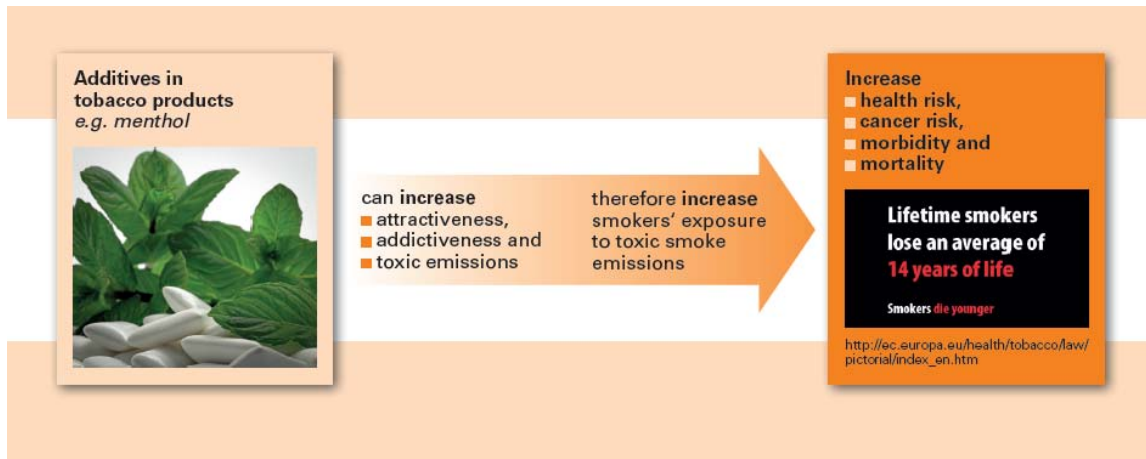
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National Institute for Public Health
and the Environment
Ministry of Health, Welfare and Sport



dkfz.
GERMAN
CANCER RESEARCH CENTER
IN THE HELMHOLTZ ASSOCIATION



Project scope and objectives

In the EU, smoking accounts for 655,000 preventable deaths per year. In addition, almost 80,000 non-smokers are estimated to die due to exposure to environmental tobacco smoke. Smoking also takes an enormous toll in health care costs and lost productivity. Still, some 30% of all European citizens smoke. Most smokers start at young age; 90% of all smokers start before the age of 18.

Tobacco additives may increase the consumption rate of tobacco products by making the product more palatable and attractive to the consumer, or by enhancing the addictiveness of the product. Additives may make individual brands taste more appealing and mask the taste and immediate discomfort of smoke. As such, additives may indirectly enhance tobacco related harm by increasing the consumption of these toxic products. The same effect will result from additives that enhance the addictiveness of tobacco components. Tobacco additives, especially when burnt, may also intrinsically increase the toxicity of the tobacco product. Many additives give toxic pyrolysis products when burnt. For instance, burning of sugars in tobacco will result in many toxic compounds including aldehydes.

Within the PITOC project, information is provided to semi-professionals (such as policy makers, NGOs, and journalists) and the general public on attractive, addictive and hazardous effects associated with the 14 additives used by the tobacco industry most often and in highest quantities. With the widespread dissemination of fact sheets on European public websites, we intend to contribute to the reduction of smoking-related morbidity and mortality by supporting tobacco product regulation. The specific goal of the project is to encourage consumers to quit or never start smoking and to support policy for tobacco product regulation by means of information provisioning. The fact sheets are therefore understandably written for both non- and semi-professionals. The laymen fact sheets are translated to the native languages of each collaborating country. Regarding its aim, the project is directly related to EAHC Health Program priority action 'Smoking prevention and tobacco control: Tobacco control in all policies'.

Methods and means

Currently, more than 1000 known ingredients are added to tobacco for product improvement. At the start of the project, from these more than 1000 ingredients, the

14 additives present in the highest amounts were selected and the key group of two EU member states, RIVM and DKFZ, each created seven fact sheets. Examples are menthol, cocoa, sugars, and vanillin; all flavoring substances approved for use in the food industry. Consumers often do not realise that these everyday food ingredients are added to tobacco. Although the ingredients are mostly approved for use in foods, some can induce harmful effects when smoked with tobacco. Unlike their use in food, additives in cigarettes are burnt (from being exposed to very high temperatures) and then inhaled. Topics addressed in the fact sheets, were the nature, general use, consumer appeal, dependence potential, toxicity and hazard classification of the chemical compounds that are added as ingredients to tobacco products. The scientists within the national institutes that prepared the fact sheets, particularly focused on objectivity of the information presented.

Fact sheets were prepared for semi-professionals based on literature research, and have been reviewed by experts in the field of tobacco additives. From these documents, information was condensed in language understandable for laymen, to prepare the non-professional fact sheets. Comprehensibility of these fact sheets was studied in a UK population with a good mix of 65 people differing in gender, smoking status (smokers and non-smokers), social economical status, and education. Results showed that the correct information was communicated, and were evaluated to refine the comprehensibility of the final non-professional fact sheets. Final fact sheets were transmitted to all collaborating countries and laymen sheets were translated in respective languages. These translations are disseminated through national websites that will be launched simultaneously throughout collaborating European countries. Stakeholders will be informed of this event via a press release.

Outputs and outcomes

As a main result of PITOC, we have an excellent network of 16 European countries that collaboratively launch websites that inform the public on the general and tobacco industry use of tobacco additives as well as their harmful health effects. In addition, the facts presented in the semi-professional PITOC fact sheets provide guidance to policy makers regarding regulation of the contents of tobacco products.

The comprehensibility study already showed that the non-professional fact sheets inform laymen about (1) the manipulation of the products by the tobacco industries to make products more attractive, and (2) the fact that considerable amounts of chemicals are added to the tobacco products they consume which become toxic or even carcinogenic upon combustion/pyrolysis. Disseminating this information to public and semi-professionals throughout Europe should reveal whether based on this information (1) the consumer may decide to never start or stop smoking and (2) regulators use this information to regulate ingredient addition by the tobacco industry.

Strategic relevance and contribution to the Health Programme

Regarding its aim, the project is directly related to EAHC Health Program priority action 'Smoking prevention and tobacco control: Tobacco control in all policies'. The PITOC fact sheets are written in the policy context of international regulation of the contents of tobacco products and regulation of tobacco product disclosures.

The World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) is a reaction to the world-wide tobacco epidemic and aims to contribute to the reduction of smoking-related morbidity and mortality. Tobacco product control, including the attractiveness of tobacco products, is one of the means to this end. Article 9 and 10 of the FCTC are concerned with the regulation of tobacco product composition, including dissemination of information on tobacco products to the general public. The partial guideline of FCTC article 9 states that regulating ingredients aimed at reducing tobacco product attractiveness can contribute to reducing the prevalence of tobacco use and dependence among new and continuing users. This prioritization of endpoints puts an emphasis in trying to regulate tobacco product attractiveness with guidance for addictiveness and toxicity being proposed at a later stage. The EU Tobacco Products Directive (2001/37/EC) prescribes that data on tobacco additives, submitted by manufacturers, needs to be disseminated to the consumers. To inform the public well, it is important that a description of the different additives is given in plain language, understandable to a non-scientist.

Conclusions and recommendations

The PITOC factsheets provide both the general public and semi-professionals with understandable, up-to-date, objective information on the harmful health effects of selected tobacco additives.

The fact presented in the PITOC fact sheets provide guidance to policy makers regarding regulation of the contents of tobacco products. In summary, many additives were found to increase the attractiveness of tobacco products, and some of them may directly or indirectly affect addictiveness. Additives that enhance the attractiveness and/or addictiveness of smoking pose an indirect health hazard, as they increase the consumption of cigarettes in smokers and thus the exposure to the toxic components of tobacco smoke. Additionally, toxic combustion products generated upon pyrolysis of additives have the potential to increase the exposure to toxic substances and thus increase the health hazard associated with cigarette smoking.

Comprehensibility of the laymen fact sheets was assured in a survey study among 65 people differing in gender, smoking status (smokers and non-smokers), social economical status, and education. The widespread dissemination to 16 collaborating countries will cause many more people to get exposed to information in the factsheets, written for the general public as well as semi-professionals. Therefore, we recommend that monitoring effects of the information provisioning as intended by PITOC should continue. Upon publication, the number of visitors per website will be monitored by all participating members. In addition, future studies should reveal the true effects of additive health hazard communication. An important research question is whether and how PITOC influenced additive health hazard perception and subsequent actions by the target groups: semi- and non-professionals. Actions may include change in tobacco product regulation by regulatory agencies (semi-professional fact sheets) or change in smoking habit, e.g. quit or never start smoking, by general public (laymen fact sheets). Furthermore, we recommend that the current information provided is kept up-to-date in the future.