

Government could control taste of cigarettes, raise taxes in battle against smoking

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The Federal Government may regulate flavours in a bid to make cigarettes less attractive to younger people. Picture: Thinkstock.
Source: Supplied

THE flavour and ingredients of cigarettes would be regulated, smoking in movies controlled and the cost of tobacco would sky-rocket under a radical Government blueprint to stop one million Australians smoking.

The five-year war on smoking would also see an end to discounted cigarettes, restrictions on the number of retailers that can sell smokes and big tobacco forced to report how much they spend on marketing.

Smokers should brace themselves for "regular staged increases" in tobacco taxes that will push the price of a pack of cigarettes over \$20.

The hardline nine-point plan to toughen tobacco control is part of a **National Tobacco Strategy** (<http://www.nationaldrugstrategy.gov.au/internet/drugstrategy/publishing.nsf/Content/draft-nts-12-18-callsubs>) endorsed by state and federal Health Ministers in November and released without fanfare on January 2.

Plain packaging rules (</news/national/retailers-selling-cigarettes-cheap-to-beat-plain-packaging-rules/story-fndo45r1-1226527725990>) that came into effect last December require all cigarettes to be sold in drab brown packets with health warnings covering most of the pack, now governments want to regulate what's in the cigarettes inside the pack.

There are currently no restrictions on the ingredients in cigarettes apart from state regulations prohibiting fruit or confectionery-flavoured cigarettes.

The five-year tobacco control strategy says cigarette companies use additives such as sugar, honey, licorice and cocoa to "enhance the taste of tobacco smoke to make the product more desirable to smokers, especially those experimenting with tobacco".

WHAT'S IN A CIGARETTE

There are more than 4000 chemicals found in cigarettes

| | | | | |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------|
| Ammonia used in household cleaners | Carbon Monoxide a poisonous gas from car exhausts | Formaldehyde a chemical used to preserve the dead | Methanol used in rocket fuels | Tar material used to make roads |
| Acetone found in paint strippers and nail polish remover | Arsenic & cyanide lethal poisons | Butane a gas used in lighter fluids | Cadmium used in car batteries | Nicotine & DDT used in insecticides |
| Tobacco the main ingredient, a green leafy plant | | | | |

"Further regulation of the contents of tobacco products and of tobacco product disclosures is an important area of tobacco control that warrants additional

THE 9 POINT PLAN

- 1** Protect public health policy, including tobacco control policies, from tobacco industry interference
- 2** Strengthen mass media campaigns to: motivate smokers to quit and recent quitters to remain quit; discourage uptake of smoking; and reshape social norms about smoking
- 3** Continue to reduce the affordability of tobacco products
- 4** Bolster and build on existing programs and partnerships to reduce smoking rates among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- 5** Strengthen efforts to reduce smoking among populations with a high prevalence of smoking
- 6** Eliminate remaining advertising, promotion and sponsorship of tobacco products
- 7** Consider further regulation of the contents, product disclosure and supply of tobacco products and alternative nicotine delivery systems
- 8** Reduce exceptions to smoke-free workplaces, public places and other settings
- 9** Provide greater access to a range of evidence-based cessation services to support smokers to quit

investigation," the strategy says.

The Federal Government has commissioned an options paper on how to do it.

Anti-tobacco lobby **Action on Smoking and Health** (<http://www.ashaust.org.au/>) says ingredient regulation would give the government power to limit the amount of nicotine in cigarettes and make them less addictive.

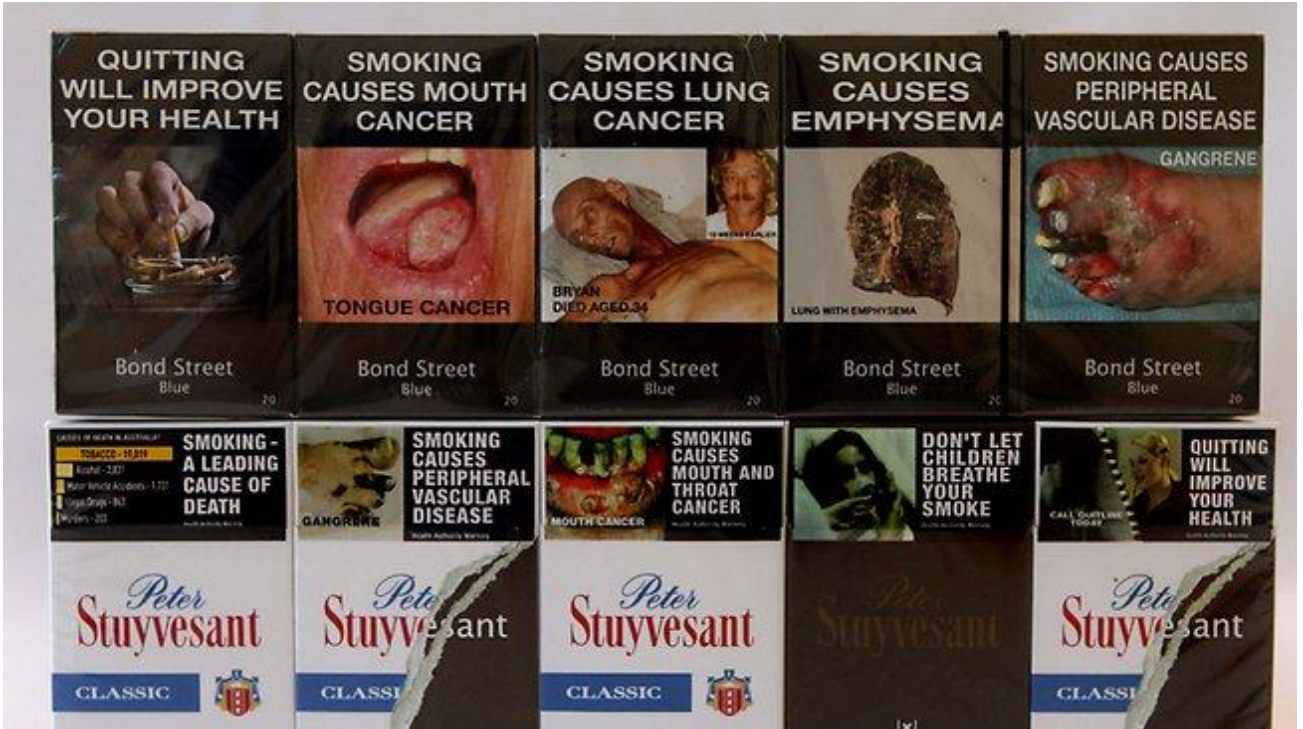
Plain packaging for cigarettes was introduced in 2012, now the government wants to go further. Picture: Kym Smith

"Governments could say to manufacturers: 'shows us evidence that this is not causing harm or reduce the nicotine to a level that is not addictive'," ASH spokeswoman Anne Jones said.

Removing flavouring from cigarettes would make them less palatable to children, she said.

Regulating the portrayal of smoking in movies, TV programs, music clips, video games is also being explored.

Anti-tobacco campaigner and University of Sydney academic Professor Simon Chapman says any attempt to regulate movies and television shows would be difficult and undesirable.



"I don't believe the state should jump into the entertainment media and say, our conception of a good society means we should eliminate the portrayal of smoking in art and literature," he said.

"Do we say we should ban crime films because they glamourise crime or car chases?" he asked.

"The government would do better to ask YouTube to change its policy of effectively allowing cigarette companies to flout advertising laws by showing branded cigarette advertisements on the internet that showed women seductively smoking cigarettes."

The plan for regular increases in tobacco tax could raise the federal government over \$1 billion a year.

Every \$1 increase in the price of tobacco is associated with a 2.6 per cent decline in smoking among low income earners, the strategy says.

Tobacco excise was increased by 25 per cent in April 2010 and a smoker buying a pack of 30s every day is now paying \$74 a week in tax for their habit.

Another 25 per cent rise in tobacco excise would raise the federal government \$1.25 billion.

The strategy also commits state and federal governments to research the potential benefits of "placing controls on the number and type of tobacco outlets in the community".

It suggests introducing a licensing scheme to restrict who can sell cigarettes.

The sale of cigarettes at supermarkets, petrol stations, milk bars, newsagents and licensed premises "contributes to the notion that tobacco products are a normal part of everyday life and are relatively harmless," the strategy says.

British American Tobacco said tobacco was already a heavily regulated product and "as yet we haven't seen the impact, if any, of the more recently introduced tobacco regulations such as plain packaging".

"British American Tobacco Australia is supportive of tobacco policy which is evidence-based and where due process and consultation with stakeholders has been undertaken," a spokeswoman said.

The nine point plan:

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