

RESEARCH NEWS



No increase in Australia's illicit tobacco trade is seen after plain packs are introduced

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London

No increase has been seen in illicit or contraband tobacco use in Sydney since Australia introduced plain packaging legislation, researchers say.

The study, presented this week at the annual scientific meeting of the Thoracic Society for Australia and New Zealand, was based on two surveys of discarded cigarette packs that were carried out 12 months apart in Sydney.¹

Australia brought in plain packaging of tobacco products alongside larger, graphic health warnings on 1 December 2012. The law removed branding on packs, which must now be a uniform olive brown colour with the brand name in a standard light grey font.

The tobacco industry has claimed that plain cigarette packaging and tax rises increase the illicit tobacco trade. It has carried out empty cigarette pack surveys that showed that over 16% of cigarettes sold in Sydney were illicit and that the sale of unbranded "white" cigarettes, not legally sold in any market, had sharply increased since the introduction of plain packaging legislation. In response, researchers said that they wanted to conduct an independent survey to test these data.

In phase I of the study 1802 cigarette packs were collected, 12.7% of which did not comply with current Australian legislation. In an extension phase of the study in which only

non-conforming packs were collected, 727 were found. Of these, 500 were manufactured in, or for, South Korea, and 66 in or for China. Only 1.4% of the cigarettes found were illicit or contraband.

Matthew Peters, study author and professor of respiratory medicine at Macquarie University in Sydney, said, "What is very clear from our survey, using the preferred methodology of the tobacco industry, is that there has been no increase in illicit tobacco use in Sydney with the recent advances in public policy. Governments overseas have no reason to fear a flood of illicit sales as they progress plain packaging legislation."

Peters added that, because the study found some organised distribution of non-domestic cigarettes—predominantly South Korean brands—effective "track and trace" technology should be introduced, to help identify where in the supply chain products are being diverted to illegal importation and sale.

1 Peters M, Saffron M. Patterns of non-compliant tobacco use in Sydney estimated using an empty cigarette pack survey. Abstracts from the annual scientific meeting of the Thoracic Society of Australia and New Zealand and the Australian and New Zealand Society of Respiratory Science. 2015. http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/enhanced/doi/10.1111/resp.12494_22/.

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