

How tobacco companies in the UK prepared for and responded to standardised packaging of cigarettes and rolling tobacco

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Abstract

Introduction As a result of the Standardised Packaging of Tobacco Products Regulations and Tobacco Products Directive, all packs of cigarettes (factory-made and hand-rolled) in the UK must be drab brown, display pictorial warnings on the principal display areas and contain no less than 20 cigarettes or 30 g of tobacco. The legislation was phased in between May 2016 and May 2017. Our objective was to monitor pack, brand and product changes preimplementation and postimplementation.

Methods Our surveillance of the cigarette market involved a review of the trade press, a monthly monitor of online supermarkets and regular visits to stores, from May 2015 to June 2017.

Results Before standardised packaging there were changes to the pack graphics (eg, redesigned packs and limited editions) and pack structure (eg, resealable inner foil) and the issue of a number of reusable tins. After standardised packaging, changes included newer cigarette pack sizes for some brand variants (eg, 23 and 24 packs). Changes to the branding prestandardised packaging included brand extensions, and poststandardised packaging included brand and/or variant name change, often with the inclusion of colour descriptors and brand migrations. Product changes prestandardised packaging included the introduction of novel filters (eg, filters with two flavour-changing capsules, tube filters, firmer filters and filters with granular additives). There was non-compliance with the legislation, with slim packs, which are not permitted, on sale after standardised packaging was implemented.

Conclusions Our findings highlight the need to monitor developments in markets introducing standardised packaging and have policy implications for countries considering this measure.