

Tobacco Control Fact Sheet January 2010

Background

Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death in Ireland. Each year over 6,500 people die prematurely from the effects of tobacco and thousands of others are ill because of tobacco-related diseases. In November 1999, the Oireachtas Joint Committee on Health and Children published "A National Anti-Smoking Strategy - A Report on Health and Smoking" which recommended that a national anti-tobacco strategy be adopted in Ireland.

In response the Tobacco Free Policy Review Group was set up to carry out a fundamental review of health and tobacco and make recommendations to the Minister for Health and Children. Their report "Towards a Tobacco Free Society" was published in 2000 and adopted as Government policy.

Measures introduced

The Smoke Free at Work Initiative was introduced in March 2004. The primary purpose of this measure is to protect the health of workers and the public from exposure to toxic environmental tobacco smoke.

This is a positive, progressive health and safety measure, which brings immediate and long-term positive benefits to workers and the general public alike. The response from all sectors to this historic measure continues to be very positive with compliance levels very high at 95%, reflecting the goodwill and overwhelming support that exists for a clean smoke-free environment in the workplace.

The maintenance of a high level of prices for tobacco products is an important factor in preventing people, particularly children from experimenting with tobacco. The majority of smokers become addicted in their childhood and teenage years. Research has clearly shown that price is an important factor in young people deciding not to smoke. In May 2007 it became illegal to sell cigarettes in packs of less than 20 or confectioneries that resemble tobacco products. By increasing the minimum number of units which may be bought, the price barrier was raised higher for children at the experimental stage. Ireland currently has the highest price for cigarettes in the EU and after Norway, the 2nd highest in Europe. At this time the age limit for sale of cigarettes to persons was also raised from 16 to 18 years to

The introduction of bilingual health warnings in October 2008 increased the size of health warnings on tobacco products (32% on front of packet & 45% on back of packet). Regulations are currently being drafted for the introduction of combined colour and text warnings on tobacco products and the date for the introduction of the new warnings will be agreed following consultation with the relevant stakeholders. Pre-testing of the 42 images in the EU library has

been conducted and the 14 warnings to be used on the Irish market have been identified

Recent changes to legislation

In July 2009, further provisions of the Public Health (Tobacco) Acts 2002 and 2004 were commenced. These included -

- (i) ban on all in-store/point-of-sale advertising of tobacco products,
- (ii) ban on the display of tobacco products in retail premises,
- (iii) introduction of a closed container / dispenser provision
- (iv) tighter controls on the location and operation of tobacco vending machines,
- (v) introduction of a retail register.

The aim of these provisions is to further de-normalise tobacco and to protect children from the dangers of tobacco consumption.

In conjunction with these new measures, the Public Health (Tobacco) (Amendment) Act 2009 was also enacted in July, which provided for some minor changes to the overall package of measures introduced on 1 July including –

- (i) allow Airport Duty Free outlets to display a pictorial list of the tobacco products sold in their outlets until 2013.
- (ii) allow the Judge, discretion on the period of time, that a person who is convicted of an offence under the Act is removed from the retail register. (Removal from the register will now be for a period not exceeding 90 days, whilst still maintaining the maximum penalty),
- (iii) allow specialist tobacco retailers the choice of selling either tobacco products and tobacco related products only or in addition to tobacco products, non-tobacco related products whilst prohibiting the sale of cigarettes. (As the legislation stood, they can only sell tobacco products and tobacco related products only) and
- (iv) allow the Minister make regulations to introduce combined text and photo warnings on tobacco products as provided for by the European Commission.

In 2010, the Public Health (Tobacco) (Amendment) (Act) 2010 provided for the functions and staff of the Office of Tobacco Control to transfer into the HSE with effect from the first of January 2011.

In 2011, the Public Health (Tobacco) (Amendment) (Act) 2011 enabled the Minister to make regulations to introduce combined text and photo warnings on tobacco products. These Regulations are currently being drafted.

***Tobacco Control Unit
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