

## Graphic health warning on cigarette packs

**Country:** Singapore

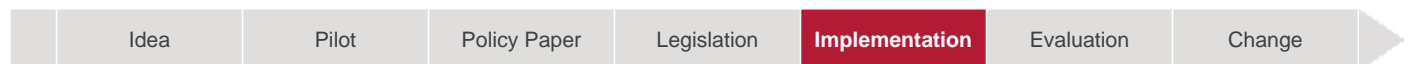
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**Survey no:** (4)2004

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**Health Policy Issues:** Public Health, Prevention

**Current Process Stages**



### 1. Abstract

As part of the Smoking (control of advertisements and sale of tobacco (labeling) Regulations 2003 which was passed in Parliament in August 2003, cigarette packets sold in Singapore after August 1, 2004, must carry graphic images of the harmful effects of smoking, such as diseased lungs.

### 2. Purpose of health policy or idea

Singapore's latest anti-smoking strategy consists of showing the gruesome effects of smoking on cigarette packs. As part of the Smoking (control of advertisements and sale of tobacco (labeling) Regulations 2003 which was passed in Parliament in August 2003, cigarette packets sold in Singapore after August 1, 2004, must carry graphic images of the harmful effects of smoking, such as diseased lungs.

Before the new rule was announced, only anti-smoking slogans like "smoking causes heart disease" and "smoking kills" were printed on cigarette packs, with no illustrations. The new graphics were sent by the Ministry of health to tobacco companies with strict guidelines on how they must be printed "clearly and conspicuously" and occupy at least 50 percent of the total surface area of the package. The pictures of bleeding brains, toothless gums, and blackened lungs are aimed at making smokers face up to the serious health effects of taking a puff. One picture shows a hospitalized man on life support with the slogan "smoking can cause a slow painful death," while another depicts a mother playing with two children while the father puffs away behind them, meant to warn of the dangers of second-hand smoke. The words and pictures appear on the front and back of the packets.

In addition, since 1991, tobacco taxation has been used to discourage smoking. The current tax is \$210 per kg of tobacco. Cigarette prices in Singapore have risen sharply as a result of stiffer duties. A 20-cigarette pack of one of the most popular US brands costs 9.50 Singapore dollars (5.60 US), more than half of which represents duties.

### 3. Characteristics of this policy

**Degree of Innovation**

traditional  innovative

**Degree of Controversy**

consensual  highly controversial

**Structural or Systemic Impact**marginal  fundamental**Public Visibility**very low  very high**Transferability**strongly system-dependent  system-neutral

## 4. Political and economic background

Singapore has comprehensive tobacco control policies and programmes. Efforts to promote a smoke-free lifestyle in Singapore include public education, legislation, tobacco taxation, community mobilisation and provision of smoking cessation services.

Since the launch of the National Smoking Control Programme in 1986, the smoking prevalence in Singapore has declined from 20% in 1984 to 14% in 2001, one of the lowest in the world. A worrying trend, however, has been the proportion of young women aged 18 to 24 who smoke every day has almost tripled between 1992 and 2001 - from 2.8 to 8.2 per cent.

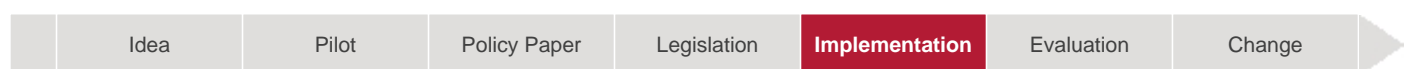
Smoking related deaths (coronary heart disease, stroke and chronic obstructive lung disease) together account for close to two-thirds of all deaths in Singapore in the year 2001.

Laws restricting smoking in public places and prohibiting tobacco advertisements started in the 1970s. Presently, Smoking is not permitted in most areas such as public transportation, elevators, government offices, cinemas, air-conditioned restaurants, and other areas where No Smoking signs are displayed.

A national smoking control campaign is held annually to raise awareness on the harmful effects of smoking and encourage smokers to quit smoking. Mass media is used extensively. Innovative publicity events and programmes are organised to elicit maximum media coverage.

Quit smoking services are provided by 3 hospitals, 16 polyclinics and some non-governmental organisations. Teachers who are interested in helping their students stop smoking are trained to conduct a school-based smoking cessation programme The QuitLine (1800-438 2000) is another feature of the Programme. Manned by trained nurse counsellors, callers can seek advice and/or information on how to quit smoking or how to help someone quit.

## 5. Purpose and process analysis



### Stakeholder positions

According to the Health Promotion Board, which champions the anti-smoking effort, the pictures are intended to reinforce the message to current and would-be smokers about the serious health consequences associated with smoking.

The move has been lauded by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a good example for other Asian countries to follow. Singapore signed the World Health Organisation (WHO) Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) on 29 December 2003. Singapore already meets the mandatory requirements of the convention, including a ban on

tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship.

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## 6. Expected outcome

It is still too early to assess if the "scare tactics" approach is working but one newspaper has reported that some young smokers, especially women, have resorted to stashing their cigarettes into cigarette cases and dumping the packs just to avoid seeing these gory pictures. These once-popular cigarette cases became passe years ago, but accessories shops said their sales have improved since the new anti-smoking campaign.

In a poll conducted by another local newspaper, smokers said they were unlikely to quit just because of the gory pictures, although most agreed they would be more mindful of the health risks from seeing the pictures.

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### Author/s and/or contributors to this survey

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