

# Tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship

## The impact of tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship

With millions of customers dying from tobacco-related illnesses or quitting each year, the tobacco industry needs to recruit thousands of new smokers every day. Tobacco advertising and promotion is the main way the tobacco industry increases tobacco use. It encourages new users, stimulates current users to consume more, tempts former users to relapse and discourages current users from quitting.

How is it possible for tobacco companies to market a product that kills up to half of all its users? The tobacco industry does this by spending billions of US dollars each year on promoting tobacco use as socially acceptable and misleadingly associating it with glamour, health, beauty and well-being. This draws attention away from the real damage to health caused by tobacco use, which is far from glamorous.

## Direct and indirect tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship

Tobacco marketing includes direct and indirect advertising, promotion and sponsorship of tobacco products and brands. Direct advertising utilizes:

- ▶ print, broadcast (television, cinema and radio) and electronic (internet) media
- ▶ billboards and transportation (on trains and buses, at stations, etc.)
- ▶ direct and electronic mail.

As the use of some direct advertising is becoming restricted in more and more countries, tobacco companies are increasingly switching to the use of indirect advertising as a way to circumvent bans. This includes:

- ▶ Point of sale promotions, including displays at tobacco vendors and vending machines, that stimulate impulse purchases, make tobacco use

appear socially-acceptable and quitting harder and have a strong impact on young people

- ▶ Tobacco product packaging and product design that make the product more attractive to consumers and promote brand identity through the use of logos, colours, fonts, shapes and other features
- ▶ Product placement in television programmes, films and games (online and computer), and celebrity endorsement
- ▶ Promotion of tobacco company brand name, logo, emblem, trademark or other distinctive features (such as combinations of colours), including on non-tobacco products such as clothing and gifts
- ▶ Price-discounts and free product giveaways
- ▶ Sponsorship of sports, music and cultural events
- ▶ Corporate social responsibility activities by which tobacco companies portray themselves as good corporate citizens through contributions to good causes and promotion of “socially responsible” aspects of their business practices.

With new forms of media rapidly evolving, new platforms for tobacco promotion appear, such as through social media. With increasing regulation on tobacco advertising and promotion in traditional print and television media, the tobacco industry has shown itself quick to migrate to mediums with less restriction. It is therefore very important that tobacco control policy evolves to face these new challenges.

## Tobacco marketing in the Eastern Mediterranean Region

As tobacco use decreases in many countries, partly due to restrictions on tobacco marketing and use, the tobacco industry is switching its efforts to the developing world where there are large and growing markets and fewer restrictions on tobacco marketing. In particular, as potential customers,



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young people and women present a major marketing opportunity for the tobacco industry.

In recent years, the industry has stepped up its efforts to market its products to women and youth through campaigns designed to appeal particularly to these groups. The Global Youth Tobacco Survey (1999–2008) found high levels of exposure in the Region to advertising on billboards and in newspapers and magazines (1). It also found that 15% of 13–15 year olds in the Region own an object with a tobacco company logo or other cigarette branding, while 9% have been offered free cigarettes (1).

## Best practices and the way forward

The public have a right to be protected from tobacco marketing. Tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship must be banned in accordance with the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). Article 13 of the FCTC requires Parties to implement measures to allow for a comprehensive ban on tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship.

Comprehensive bans reduce tobacco use. They protect particularly young people who have not started to use tobacco and help current users to quit. Partial bans do not work. They have been shown to have little or no impact on consumption. Tobacco companies tend to switch their marketing to unregulated methods, such as sport sponsorship and point of sale displays.

Guidelines for implementing Article 13 have been adopted that guide governments in developing and implementing comprehensive legislation. The guidelines recommend a number of key measures.

- ▶ Comprehensive bans on all direct and indirect forms of tobacco advertising, promotion and sponsorship, covering all media platforms.
- ▶ Effective implementation of strong and well-drafted legislation, monitoring of compliance and enforcement with substantial penalties, supported by public education.
- ▶ Banning commercial displays of product packaging at points of sale.
- ▶ Large health warnings, including pictures, on product packaging to reduce the impact of advertising, and plain packaging requirements, including prescribed and standardized design features (shape, size, font, colours), to eliminate advertising and promotional features.
- ▶ Discarding unenforceable voluntary self-regulation proposed by the tobacco industry.
- ▶ Ensuring bans cover cross-border promotion originating in and entering a country.
- ▶ Updating bans as required in response to innovations in industry tactics and media technology.

## References

1. Warren CW et al. *Global tobacco surveillance system: The GTSS Atlas*. Atlanta, CDC Foundation, 2009.