



Tobacco Directive: Parliament approves plans to deter young people from smoking

Committees Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety
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Draft legislation updating the EU Tobacco Directive to make tobacco products less attractive to young people was endorsed by MEPs on Wednesday. This legislation, already informally agreed with EU health ministers, would require all packs to carry picture warnings covering 65% of their surface. E-cigarettes would be regulated, either as medicinal products if they claim to help smokers to quit, or as tobacco products.

"This is the culmination of years of work against the background of intense lobbying from the tobacco industry and its front groups. The new measures are a big step forward for tobacco control, and will help to prevent the next generation of smokers from being recruited. We know that it is children – not adults – who start to smoke: the overwhelming majority of smokers start before their 18th birthday" said rapporteur Linda McAvan (S&D, UK). The draft legislation was approved by 514 votes to 66, with 58 abstentions.

Health warnings: two-thirds of the pack, front and back

Current legislation requires that health warnings cover at least 30% of the area of the front of the pack and 40% of the back. The proposed text would increase this to 65%, front and back, and would require these warnings to be in picture form - something that does not happen in the majority of member states at the moment. Packs of fewer than 20 cigarettes - which are cheaper and hence more accessible to children - would be banned in the handful of countries where they are still allowed on the market.

Dual route for E-cigarettes

As proposed by MEPs, e-cigarettes would be regulated, either as medicinal products, if they are marketed as a quitting aid, or alternatively as tobacco products. In the latter case, their nicotine concentration should not exceed 20 mg/ml. Refillable e-cigarettes would be allowed. Electronic cigarettes should be childproof and should carry health warnings. They would be subject to the same advertising restrictions as tobacco products.

Additives listed, flavours banned

The text would ban flavourings in cigarettes and roll-your-own tobacco that would make the product more attractive by giving it a "characterising flavour". Menthol would be banned from 2020. Flavours would be allowed for water pipe tobacco.

Certain additives which are particularly damaging to health would be banned, and regulators would have new powers to require the tobacco industry to carry out extra studies on a "priority list" list of additives, to be set out in a delegated act. Additives essential to produce tobacco, such as sugar, would be authorised.

700,000 deaths per year in the EU

Twelve years after the current directive entered into force, smoking remains the principal preventable cause of death in the EU and about 700,000 people die of it each year. Over the years, measures taken to discourage smoking have helped to reduce the proportion of EU citizens who smoke from 40% in the EU15 in 2002 to 28% in the EU 27 in 2012.

Next steps

The text is to be approved by the Council of Ministers on 14 March. Member states would have to put the provisions on tobacco products into effect within two years of the updated

Press release

directive's date of entry into force.

Procedure: *Co-decision, first reading*

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