



PRESS RELEASE

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PLAIN PACKAGING OF TOBACCO

The suggestion that plain packaging could be a way to reduce tobacco smoking by young people has suddenly emerged as a government proposal, with no indication as to whether it is instead of or as well as restricted tobacco displays.

Ken Parsons, Chief Executive of the RSA, said, "This is an area where actions really need to be based on evidence. Suddenly this proposal has come out of the woodwork, with no evidence to back it up one way or the other. Retailers are being left without any guidance as how this might affect the tobacco "going dark" issue. At the very least, if the Minister needs longer to reach a decision, then he must postpone the proposed timetable for implementing display restrictions. It is the retail industry being kept in the dark, not tobacco".

No other major market has gone down this route so evidence there is little evidence on whether it would have any effect. Current UK packs are covered with health warnings and graphic pictures – they are not exactly attractive now. Subjectively, there would seem to be a danger of plain packaging making the product more edgy for rebellious young people, rather than mundane, but nobody really knows. Use of cannabis and other illegal drugs by young people does not seem to depend on branded packaging.

We would rather assume that the big tobacco companies would take legal action to protect their brand identities and that this would prevent action on this front for months if not years as cases meander through the courts. This would seem an area where it would be sensible for another EC country to make the first move so that we could get some evidence before making any changes in the UK.

Notes for editors:

The Rural Shops Alliance (RSA) is the national voice for about 7,500 rural retailers. We campaign on their behalf and also help these shops to become more competitive with practical advice and support, to the benefit of thousands of rural communities. Many 'blue chip' suppliers and county councils sponsor and partner the work of the RSA. Our direct contact with rural shops and with these organisations means that we keep in close touch with emerging issues and concerns in our fast changing business sector.

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