



PRESS RELEASE

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COUNTERFEIT TOBACCO

The recent Panorama programme (Monday March 7th) on tobacco smuggling highlighted the size of this problem. Most obviously, there is a massive loss of tax revenue to the Exchequer. However, it is estimated that half of smuggled tobacco products are now counterfeit, often containing very high levels of lead, cadmium and other poisons. If legitimate tobacco is a health hazard, the counterfeit product is very much worse. The economics of this sordid trade means that the gangs involved can afford to have a significant proportion of their shipments seized and still make massive profits from the rest. There are now few places in the country where counterfeit tobacco is not easy to find.

Ken Parsons, Chief Executive of the RSA, commented, "The Coalition government has still not announced how it will implement the 2009 Health Act to reduce tobacco consumption. There has been no announcement on the proposed new rules to restrict displays of tobacco, despite the fact that these are due to be implemented from this autumn. . If tobacco goes "under-the-counter" in all outlets, this makes it far harder for customers and the authorities to distinguish the genuine from the fake. There is also speculation that plain packaging for tobacco products is on the agenda. This would obviously be easier for counterfeiters to copy.

However unpalatable it might be to the Department of Health, It is vital that tobacco users are encouraged to obtain genuine product from reputable outlets rather than counterfeit supplies from smugglers, as the lesser of two evils. Current plans, making it more difficult for legitimate shops to sell tobacco, would have the unintended consequence of encouraging the illicit trade and could actually increase the damage to the nation's health from increased counterfeit tobacco use".

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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