

Doubts on effect of ban on cigarette displays

Retailers say demand will remain despite invisibility of goods

The Government's proposed ban on the display of cigarettes in shops will have no effect on the number of people smoking, it has been claimed.

The measure is to be introduced from next year in an effort to reduce smoking, especially among young people.

The Convenience Stores and Newsagents Association said it had "no problem" with the proposed new regulations.

But the group's chief executive, Vincent Jennings, claimed that putting cigarettes out of sight would have no impact on sales as the demand would still be there.

"This won't take a single package of cigarettes off the market," said Mr Jennings, adding that customers might change brands but would not alter their smoking habits.

Minister of State with special responsibility for health promotion Pat the Cope Gallagher indicated that a decision had yet to be made on whether pictorial warning about the dangers of smoking were to be placed on cigarette packets.

The Government is proposing that retailers remove the existing prominent placing of tobacco products on their premises and that cigarettes be put in closed sealed containers where individual brands are not visible to customers.

Mr Gallagher said he wanted the new measure on cigarette placements to be introduced next year and consultation has been ongoing with all the various industry stakeholders.

The advertising of tobacco products is also to be prohibited in stores and there are to be tighter controls on the location and operation of cigarette vending machines.

A total of 280 million packets of cigarettes were sold in Ireland last year, said Mr Jennings. He added it was his understanding the Government would introduce legislation by the first quarter of 2009 to make room for associated structural changes in thousands of shops.

Mr Jennings said that his 1,500 members also wanted assurances that replacement areas designated for cigarettes would not be under the counter at hip level for health and safety reasons.

He said that staff could suffer from repetitive stress injury if they had to bend down about 300 times a day to retrieve cigarette packets and an under-the-counter location would also pose a security risk for staff as they would not be looking at the customer at all times.

Mr Gallagher is considering a system in which "large displays of cigarettes in retail outlets will have to come down, along with the elimination of in-store advertising".

"We are also considering these alarming pictorial warnings," but he would not elaborate on the graphic nature or otherwise of such images.

He said the changes were not finalised, but said public health needed to be protected.

Mr Gallagher was speaking at the launch of the Irish Cancer Society's 2008 Daffodil Day Campaign.

Chief executive of the society John McCormack said the number of new diagnosed cancer cases was rising at an alarming rate each year due to an ageing population and unhealthy lifestyle choices.

The National Cancer Registry has estimated that by 2010 the number of new cases will rise to nearly 30,000, increasing to more than 41,700 in 2020.

Mr McCormack also said the society supported the Government's eight designated specialist cancer centres, but wants assurances that "the new centres are in place before existing services are phased out in smaller hospitals".

Irish Cancer Society chairman Prof John Armstrong also calls for a "zero tolerance" policy towards under-age smoking.