

## Plain and Standardized Tobacco Packaging: One Package Format—Slide-and-Shell—One Package Size

### Introduction

The federal government has committed to implementing plain and standardized tobacco packaging (PSP) before the end of its mandate (October 2020). Bill S-5, which would give the government legal authority to enact PSP, is winding its way through Parliament. Once the Bill has been passed, draft regulations will be published in the *Canada Gazette, Part I* that spell out all of the specific prohibitions and requirements that constitute “plain” and “standardized” packaging of tobacco products.

The public will have 75 calendar days from the date of publication to comment on the proposal.

Based on a significant body of research evidence and Australia's experience with PSP over the past four years, **health groups in Canada are unanimous in**

**their call for Canadian PSP regulations to restrict cigarette packs to one format—slide-and-shell—and to one uniform pack size.**

### Why Slide-and-Shell?

Simply put, both the exterior and interior health warning messages on slide-and-shell packs are vastly superior to those on flip tops.

Since graphic health warnings came into effect in Canada in 2001, Canadian tobacco companies have been replacing the Canadian standard slide-and-shell pack with various sizes of flip top package. This changeover accelerated when the warning size was

increased to 75% in 2010, and by 2013 flip top sales had surpassed sales of slide-and-shell.

One of the most important impacts of PSP is that without the eye-catching colours, logos, graphics, fonts, and embossing that usually adorn cigarette packs, the health warning becomes more noticeable and has a much greater impact. The major surfaces of even the largest flip top pack on the market are considerably smaller than those of the slide-and-shell, which means the health warning message is also smaller. As shown at left, the flip top pack of 20

superslim cigarettes is so small that the warning text is virtually illegible and the graphic image not only loses its impact but is practically indecipherable. Several research studies have found that “health warning size may have a positive, interactive effect with plain



packaging”; in other words, larger warnings on plain tobacco packs reduce consumer appeal and consumer demand more than smaller warnings on plain packs do.

Furthermore, with a slide-and-shell pack, the full health warning is visible whether the pack is open or closed. As shown on the next page, when a flip top pack is opened, the graphic image is no longer visible, dramatically decreasing the impact of the graphic image precisely when the smoker is making the decision to smoke.

The *interior* health information messaging of the slide-and-shell pack is also preferable to that of the flip top for several reasons. With a flip top, the



interior message is printed on a disposable insert. These inserts vary in size, from a mere 45mm x 75mm to 55mm x 90mm, with some folded in half or in thirds to fit into the tiny purse packs, and none large enough to really capture a smoker's attention. Moreover, in order to retrieve a cigarette, the first thing a smoker does when opening a pack is discard the insert. Not only does this create vast quantities of unnecessary paper litter, but it also limits the potential life of the message to a single reading.



The message on the slide-and-shell has two distinct components—the “tease” on the flap, and the message itself on the back of the slide. This system offers several clear advantages over the insert:

- the tease (shown at left), if written effectively, will entice smokers (and others) to read the health message;
- the message survives for the life of the cigarette pack and thus has the potential to be read by smokers and their families and friends for a much longer period of time; and
- the message is much larger and thus more legible and visually appealing than the message printed on a tiny leaflet.

The Guidelines on packaging and labelling of the global tobacco treaty, the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, recognize what numerous research studies have shown—the effectiveness of health warnings increases with their size. The Guidelines call for plain packaging, in part, in order to “increase the noticeability and effectiveness of health warnings and messages, prevent the package from detracting attention from them, and address industry package design techniques that may suggest that some products are less harmful than others.”

Permitting cigarettes to be sold in Canada only in slide-and-shell packs of a uniform size will maximize the noticeability and salience of both the exterior and interior health messages. It will also ensure that there are no small and distinctive package sizes and shapes on the market that detract from the seriousness of the warnings and convey the erroneous impression that the cigarettes in the small packs contain less tobacco/tar/nicotine and are thus less harmful than those in large packs. Limiting packs to a single quantity of cigarettes will prevent tobacco companies from altering the quantity to attract new and retain current price-sensitive smokers.

Products that kill half their long-term users should not be sold in pretty little boxes. Tobacco companies should not be permitted to vary the size, shape, and opening style of cigarette packs to attract new customers or to downplay the health concerns of smokers and thus keep them smoking. Canadians deserve plain and standardized tobacco packaging, and cigarette packs that are available only in one size of slide-and-shell will maximize the benefits of this reform.

