

Beat: Politics

Public Health Committee backs agreement with EU Ministers

Tobacco Directive

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USPA NEWS - Draft legislation agreed with the Council of Ministers to make tobacco products less attractive to young people was endorsed by Public Health Committee MEPs on Wednesday. This legislation, updating the EU Tobacco Directive, would require all packs to carry a health warning 65% of their surface.

E-cigarettes would be regulated, either as medicinal products, if they make quit claims, or as tobacco products.

"We know that it is children, not adults, who start smoking. And despite the downward trend in adult smoker numbers in most member states, World Health Organization figures show worrying upward trends in young smoker numbers in some member states. We need to stop tobacco companies targeting young people with an array of gimmicky products" said rapporteur Linda McAvan (S&D, UK). A provisional first reading agreement, reached with the Lithuanian Presidency of the Council of Ministers on 16 December 2013.

And confirmed by the permanent committee of member states' representatives (COREPER) two days later, was endorsed in committee by 49 votes to 7 with 4 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 would be banned.

Dual route for E-cigarettes

As proposed by MEPs, e-cigarettes would be regulated, either as medicinal products, if they are marketed as a quit aid, or alternatively as tobacco products. In the latter case, they should not contain nicotine in a concentration of more than 20 mg/ml. Refillable cartridges would be allowed, so would be flavourings.

A single cartridge should contain the equivalent in nicotine of a pack of cigarettes. 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"^[2]. Menthol would be banned from 2020. Flavourings would be allowed for water pipes.

A "priority list" list of additives allowed in cigarettes and roll-your-own tobacco would be laid down by the European Commission. 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 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 agreed text will be debated and put to a plenary vote, either at the 24-27 February session or the 10-13 March one.

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