



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

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Letter to the Editor

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NO REVERSAL TO “KIDDIE” PACKS

The Consumers' Association of Penang (CAP) wants the government to ensure that the ban of “kiddie” cigarette packs remain because the primary objective of “kiddie” packs is to entice the youth, potential smokers, and women.

“Kiddie” packs comprising less than 20 sticks are more affordable to these segments of the population. This will not deter regular smokers from paying more for a pack because they are already addicted to nicotine found in cigarettes.

Nicotine is known to be more addictive than cocaine or morphine and once addicted, the smoker is likely to be a customer of the industry for life.

Thus for obvious reasons, such packs of seven and ten sticks of cigarettes were banned in 2006 and this was followed by a ban on 14-stick packs in 2010. There is absolutely no reason why “kiddie” packs should be brought back considering the fact that it took so much effort to ban it amid interference by the tobacco industry.

Smoking is associated with a myriad of diseases ranging from various kinds of cancers to cardiovascular disease. Tobacco smoke has more than 4,000 chemicals of which more than 60 of them are known to cause cancer (e.g. formaldehyde) and six others chemicals that interfere with normal cell development (e.g. nicotine and carbon monoxide).

In a 2004 study on three most common smoking-related diseases (ischemic heart disease, IHD), Chronic Obstructive Pulmonary Disease (COPD), and lung cancer. It was found that the country spent RM630.4 million on IHD, RM116.6 million on lung cancer, and RM2,306 million on COPD. Hence, the government spent a total of RM3,053 million per year on the treatment of these three diseases and the same amount would have been about RM4,190 million today after considering annual inflation and Consumer Price Index over the years.

Smoking-related diseases killed about 20,000 Malaysians in 2015 and there were 2.7 million youth smokers aged between 13 and 15 in 2009. The tobacco industry would try to convince the government that “kiddie” packs are meant for adults who want to smoke less but in reality it is reaching out to youths who want to start. Authorising the sale of such packs will give the general population a misleading indication that it is “okay” and “normal” to smoke, thereby undoing all the efforts that the government has been spearheading over the years.

CAP strongly urges the government to proceed with strong tobacco control measures as recommended by the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC). In fact, instead of giving in to the tobacco industry's persuasions, the government should consider beefing up to curb cigarette smuggling activities, mandatory jail sentence and confiscating the properties of those involved.

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