



# Closing the Doors on Tobacco Promotion



## Executive Summary

An assessment of small retailer preparations for tobacco point of sale display removal and longer-term tobacco disinvestment

March 2015

A report by Robert Calder, Sara Hitchman, Catriona Rooke and Ann McNeill  
Institute of Psychiatry, Psychology & Neuroscience, King's College London,  
UK Centre for Tobacco & Alcohol Studies

Commissioned by Cancer Research UK

This report was written by Robert Calder, Sara Hitchman,  
Catriona Rooke and Ann McNeill



The report was commissioned by Cancer Research UK



For media enquiries please contact:  
Cancer Research UK press office on: 0203 469 8300;  
Out of hours: 07050 264 059

Cover Image: Nicolas Chinardet

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## INTRODUCTION

Tobacco use and exposure to second hand smoke kills an estimated 6 million people each year worldwide. Although tobacco use in the UK has declined from over 40% in the 1970s to under 20%, it still kills 100,000 people each year and is estimated to cost the UK economy £13bn a year. The World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control is an international treaty which details measures to reduce demand for tobacco, including a ban on tobacco advertising, noting that tobacco point of sale (PoS) displays can constitute a form of advertising. Exposure to tobacco PoS displays increases tobacco cravings and impulse tobacco purchases among adult smokers, as well as undermining quit attempts among those wishing to stop smoking by increasing cravings and urges to smoke. Studies also show that children who are exposed to tobacco point of sale displays are more likely to initiate smoking. Accordingly in England, tobacco PoS displays were removed in large shops in 2012 and are due for removal in small shops by 6<sup>th</sup> April 2015. This study assessed retailer preparations for the removal of PoS displays in small shops.

## METHODOLOGY

Small shops selling tobacco in disadvantaged wards in Newcastle and in London were identified. These shops were audited and details about tobacco PoS displays were recorded including size and type of display as well as tobacco brands, electronic cigarette (e-cigarette) brands and promotional displays. Interviews were arranged with a subsample of 62 retailers to discuss plans for the implementation of the point of sale legislation (PoS law), sources of information and support, e-cigarette sales, and tobacco sales. The retailers were also asked about their reliance on tobacco products and whether they were interested in disinvesting from tobacco. The retail trade press was scanned for tobacco related articles which were then coded according to whether and how they referred to the PoS law, standardised packaging, and tobacco related content including quotes and other input from tobacco, retail and public health representatives.

## RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

Retailers were largely aware of the PoS law, although there were some who were unsure of the date of implementation. Most retailers were prepared to implement the PoS law and most had either received, or expected to receive, help from the tobacco industry. The retail trade press was the other main source of information cited. Tobacco industry help ranged from paying for the tobacco PoS display changes completely, to providing information and advice about the changes. Where the

tobacco industry was paying for the required changes they were mostly placing shutters or sliding doors over the existing display. Tobacco industry quotes from retail trade magazines suggest that the brief times when these shutters are open for serving customers are being seen as an opportunity for raising tobacco brand awareness.

An established relationship between retailers and tobacco industry representatives (reps) was reported throughout the study, with many retailers reporting visits from multiple tobacco reps alongside e-cigarette reps and small numbers of reps for other smoking related products such as rolling papers and lighters. Most tobacco PoS displays were owned by the tobacco industry and were regularly serviced by tobacco industry reps. However, around a quarter of retailers reported that their tobacco PoS display had recently been sold back to them, meaning that they would have to pay for any changes in line with the PoS law, but also that they would gain ownership and control over their tobacco PoS display.

A minority of retailers were opposed to the PoS law but more were opposed to standardised packaging. Nearly all retailers said that tobacco was either important or very important for business, yet nearly all (94%) acknowledged the low profit margins on tobacco products and around 40% of retailers were interested in reducing their reliance on tobacco. There were differing opinions towards a tobacco licensing system, although a large minority was supportive.

E-cigarettes were sold in the majority of shops although the brands, the number of brands and the placement of e-cigarettes varied. Some retailers reported low e-cigarette sales, whereas other retailers reported high demand for e-cigarettes. The two most prominent brands of e-cigarette were owned by the tobacco industry.

The retail trade press articles were predominantly opposed to tobacco control measures and, similar to the retailers, the articles were more negative towards standardised packaging than to the PoS law. There were more quotes and input from tobacco industry reps than from people in the public health field.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

This report makes the following recommendations:

1. *Tobacco retail licensing system*: Around a fifth of retailers were in favour of a tobacco licensing system. The advantages and disadvantages of a licensing system should be explored further.
2. *Increase overall communication with tobacco retailers*: Given retailers' sources of information were predominantly the tobacco industry and retail trade press, there is an opportunity for governmental and non-governmental sectors to have greater dialogue with retailers about the rationale for tobacco control and tobacco control measures in general.
3. *Educate retailers about the upcoming PoS law*: Most small retailers have decided how to comply with the PoS law but there is still an opportunity to ensure that all retailers are aware of the implementation date and the range of potential solutions.
4. *Economic research on small retailer tobacco sales*: Retailers showed an interest in decreasing their reliance on tobacco sales and nearly all acknowledged that tobacco products have very small profit margins. At the same time, retailers believed that they were very reliant on tobacco sales. Given the limited number of studies in this area, there is an opportunity for research to explore how tobacco retailers might disinvest from tobacco.
5. *Small retailers and health promotion*: There is an opportunity for small retailers to be health promoting. Large cities, including New York City, have developed programs to help retailers offer healthy products to their customers.
6. *E-cigarette sales*: A limited range of e-cigarettes were on sale in the small shops that were audited. Retailers seem to be cautious about potential future legislation and health consequences. Information and guidance on e-cigarettes may be helpful to retailers.

## Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Aftab Mahmood, King's College London for his contribution to the fieldwork for this study. We are also grateful to Cancer Research UK, John McClurey and colleagues from ASH and the Department of Health who commented on preliminary findings.

This work was commissioned by Cancer Research UK.

**Patron** Her Majesty The Queen

**Presidents** HRH The Duke Of Gloucester KG GCVO and HRH Princess Alexandra, the Hon. Lady Ogilvy KG GCVO

**Chief Executive** Dr Harpal S. Kumar

**Registered Charity** in England and Wales (1089464), Scotland (SC041666) and the Isle of Man (1103)

**Registered Company** limited by guarantee in England and Wales (4325234) and registered in the Isle of Man (5713F)

**Registered Address** Angel Building, 407 St John Street, London EC1V 4AD

