

Plain, standardised cigarette packs not a problem for small shops

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(Medical Xpress)—Putting all cigarettes in packs of uniform colour, size and design has not caused sales staff any problems in serving customers according to new research¹ published today (Tuesday).

Researchers examining the impact of plain, standardised tobacco packaging studied how long it took shop assistants to identify and retrieve [cigarettes](#) in small shops across Australia - twice before the rollout of standardised packaging in December 2012, and twice after.

The study contradicts research from the [tobacco industry](#) which claimed it would take longer to serve standard packs of cigarettes, confuse shop keepers, cause queues and disrupt shops.

Directly after the introduction of the new packaging, there was an average increase in the serving time of two to three seconds to around 12.5 seconds compared to the earlier two samples.

Retailers quickly adapted to standard packaging and the transaction time returned to normal levels during the second week of implementation and remained there several months later. The average time to serve tobacco at the end of the study in February was 10.37 seconds.

Researchers visited 303 small shops selling

tobacco from four different cities². They recorded the time it took from requesting a specific pack to when the pack was scanned or placed on the counter.

The study was supported by Quit Victoria, Cancer Council Australia, Cancer Council South Australia, Cancer Council Victoria, Cancer Research UK, Fresh, Smokefree Southwest, Tobacco Free Futures and Action on Smoking and Health (UK).

Professor [Melanie](#) Wakefield, lead author and director of the Centre for Behavioural Research in Cancer, Cancer Council Victoria, said: "Groups with tobacco industry funding had argued that plain tobacco packaging would make it difficult for small retailers to identify different cigarettes.

"They said the impact of this packaging would lead to an increase in the time it took to serve customers, cause inconvenience and ultimately a loss of trade as frustrated customers went elsewhere. These predictions contrast with the reality of standardised packaging in Australia. In our objectively measured study involving a large number of stores, small retailers quickly adapted to serving the standardized packs, with a very small increase in serving time which lasted only for the first week of implementation. After that, it was business as usual."

Sarah Woolnough, Cancer Research UK's executive director of policy and information, said: "These results are another example of why claims made by those in receipt of tobacco industry funding should be treated with extreme caution. After adjusting to the new packs, small shops did not collapse into chaos simply because the slick designs of earlier packaging were removed.

"The tobacco industry continues to fight all efforts to reduce the appeal of its lethal product. This measure is not about damaging the UK retail industry at all. It's about protecting children from a

deadly addiction.

"We urge the UK government to silence the marketing mouthpiece of the tobacco industry and give millions of children one less reason to start smoking. Standardised packaging should be introduced for all tobacco products as soon as possible."

Deborah Arnott, chief executive of health charity ASH said: "The tobacco industry says wait for the evidence from Australia. Well, here it is and it kills the industry argument that it will harm small retailers stone dead. Standardised [packaging](#) is popular with the public, with politicians and with the experts: there's no excuse for putting it off. Every day the Government dithers the equivalent of over two jumbo jets full of children start smoking and many will go on to die as a result."

More information: Wakefield, M., Bayly, M. and Scollo, M. (2013). Product retrieval time in small tobacco retail outlets before and after the Australian plain packaging policy: real-world study *Tobacco Control*. DOI: [10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2013-050987](https://doi.org/10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2013-050987)

Provided by Cancer Research UK

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