

## Tobacco Companies Challenge Efforts in US, Australia



Cigarette packs with graphic health pictures at a pub in Sydney, Australia AP

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This is the VOA Special English Health Report.

Tobacco companies are fighting efforts in the United States and Australia to make their products less appealing.

In Washington, a federal judge last week blocked the Food and Drug Administration from requiring new warning labels on cigarette packs. Judge Richard Leon ruled in a case brought by five tobacco companies.

The judge temporarily stopped a new federal rule to require large new warnings starting next September. These include color images such as a dead body or diseased lungs.

Simple text warnings now appear.

Congress called for color images showing the dangers of smoking, similar to what Canada does. But the tobacco companies say the new requirements violate their free speech rights guaranteed by the Constitution.

Judge Leon said the FDA could not require the new labels before a lawsuit against the government is decided. Some experts say the process could take years. The judge said he believes the cigarette makers are highly likely to win their case.

He says the images are designed to appeal to emotion, rejecting government arguments that they are purely factual. He accused the government of trying to use the labels to promote an "obvious anti-smoking agenda!"

The head of an anti-smoking group, the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, called the decision "wrong on the science and wrong on the law."

About one-fifth of American adults smoke. The World Health Organization says tobacco kills nearly six million people worldwide each year. More than six hundred thousand of them are non-smokers who breathe other people's tobacco smoke.

In Australia, tobacco companies want to stop what would be the world's most restrictive laws on cigarette advertising. Cigarettes could be sold only in plain olive-green packages. Only the brand name and health warnings could appear.

The Senate passed the bill last week and sent it back to the lower house to approve minor amendments. The law is to go into effect in December of next year.

Tobacco companies say the legislation violates the Australian constitution. They say it would unjustly reduce the value of their brand names and trademarks. Health Minister Nicola Roxon says the government is ready for a legal fight.

NICOLA ROXON: "Every time a smoker -- twenty or thirty times a day -- takes a cigarette pack out of their pocket, we want to make sure that all that it's showing is the harm that can be caused from tobacco. This law will be a big win for families who have lost a loved one to tobacco-related illness."

And that's the VOA Special English Health Report. I'm Faith Lapidus.