

Why You're Going to See More Signs About the Health Risks of Smoking

In nearly 220,000 stores, tobacco companies must post signs “telling the truth about the deadly consequences of cigarette smoking.”

July 11, 2023 By American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network

The following is a statement of the American Cancer Society, American Cancer Society Cancer Action Network, American Heart Association, American Lung Association, Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights, The Center for Black Health & Equity (formerly the National African American Tobacco Prevention Network) and the Tobacco-Free Kids Action Fund (public health intervenors in the case).

Starting July 1, the major U.S. tobacco companies must begin to post eye-catching [signs](#) telling the public the truth about the deadly consequences of cigarette smoking at about 220,000 retail stores across the nation that sell cigarettes. Under a federal court order, the signs will be installed near cigarette displays in these stores between July 1 and September 30 and must be displayed until June 30, 2025. This is a long-overdue step in holding the tobacco industry accountable for decades of lies that led to addiction, disease and premature death for millions of people.

These signs are the final step in implementing the “corrective statements” the tobacco companies were first ordered to make in 2006, when U.S. District Judge Gladys Kessler issued a landmark judgment that these companies violated civil racketeering laws and lied to the public for decades about the health risks and addictiveness of cigarettes and their marketing to children. The tobacco companies fought these point-of-sale corrective statements in court for 16 years, but the parties to the case – including the U.S. Department of Justice, our organizations (public health intervenors) and the tobacco companies – negotiated an agreement last year for the corrective statement signs to finally be posted. A [federal court order](#) formalized the agreement in December.

The order applies to tobacco companies Altria and its Philip Morris USA subsidiary, R.J. Reynolds and ITG Brands.

The point-of-sale signs will tell the public the truth about the health harms of smoking and secondhand smoke, the addictiveness of smoking and nicotine, and the industry's manipulation of cigarettes to make them more addictive. Critically, this truthful information will be provided to consumers at the point where they are making decisions whether to purchase cigarettes.

The corrective statements are powerful reminders that tobacco's horrific toll is no accident. It stems directly from the tobacco industry's deceptive and illegal practices. As Judge Kessler found in her nearly 1,700-page [final opinion](#), the tobacco companies have engaged in massive deception and wrongdoing:

"Over the course of more than 50 years, Defendants lied, misrepresented, and deceived the American public, including smokers and the young people they avidly sought as 'replacement smokers,' about the devastating health effects of smoking and environmental tobacco smoke, they suppressed research, they destroyed documents, they manipulated the use of nicotine so as to increase and perpetuate addiction, they distorted the truth about low tar and light cigarettes so as to discourage smokers from quitting, and they abused the legal system in order to achieve their goal – to make money with little, if any, regard for individual illness and suffering, soaring health costs, or the integrity of the legal system."

Importantly, Judge Kessler concluded, "The evidence in this case clearly establishes that Defendants have not ceased engaging in unlawful activity.... Their continuing conduct misleads consumers in order to maximize Defendants' revenues by recruiting new smokers (the majority of whom are under the age of 18), preventing current smokers from quitting, and thereby sustaining the industry."

Judge Kessler's words were prescient. Today, Altria and Reynolds are waging deceptive campaigns claiming that they have changed despite the fact they continue to spend billions to market cigarettes and aggressively fight policies that actually reduce smoking. In the latest example, these companies are fighting federal, state and local efforts to end the sale of menthol cigarettes — products that make it easier for kids to start smoking and harder for smokers to quit and that these companies have intentionally marketed to Black communities at enormous cost in health and lives. These companies are also fighting proposed graphic warnings on cigarette packs in the U.S. — a best-practice policy adopted by over 125 countries around the world. The industry, together with its front groups and allies, continues to fight to defeat and roll back statewide smoke-free laws, especially for hospitality workplaces, thereby unfairly endangering the health of a workforce that employs a high percentage of women and people of color.

Policymakers at all levels must stand up to the tobacco industry and its lies and take bold action to protect children and save lives.

Implementation Details

The corrective statement signs will be installed in stores between July 1 and September 30 and must be displayed until June 30, 2025. They will appear in about 220,000 stores covered by marketing agreements with the defendant tobacco companies. The signs will be in both English and Spanish, with the latter required in geographic areas with significant Spanish-speaking populations. There are 17 distinct corrective statements, all specified by the court many years ago.

The court order includes measures to ensure compliance. Among other steps, independent auditors will monitor compliance at the manufacturers' expense, and a tip line will be established so that the public can report incidents of non-compliance.

The corrective statements have previously been disseminated through newspaper and television ads and on cigarette packs, and they will remain indefinitely on the tobacco companies' websites. The statements are intended to prevent and restrain future fraud by an industry that has lied to the American people for decades.

More information:

- [Department of Justice press release](#)
- [American Cancer Society Action Network](#): Fact sheet on the point-of-sale corrective statements
- [Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids](#): More information about the federal government's racketeering lawsuit and Judge Kessler's 2006 judgment.

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