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## Plain packaging for cigarettes

Written by **Tom Clougherty** | Thursday 22 September 2011

Richard White had an interesting [piece](#) on the Guardian website on Tuesday, concerning plain packaging laws for cigarettes. Mandatory plain packaging comes into force in Australia next year, and there is already talk of the UK adopting similar rules. The UK's nanny-in-chief, Andrew Lansley, is said to be keen on the idea. But as White suggests, there is little evidence that plain packaging would actually achieve its stated aim, which is to discourage youth smoking and impulse buying of cigarettes:

No evidence exists, however, to suggest that anyone "impulsively" buys cigarettes, nor is there evidence that the policy would make any difference to smoking rates as no country has yet implemented it. Just as a teetotaler would not be persuaded to take up drinking just because WKD is colourful, there is nothing to suggest that non-smokers start smoking because the packet has fancy emblems. In fact, with large text warnings on the front and graphic pictures on the back taking up a large portion of the packaging, there is little left of the manufacturers' own designs.

A display ban in England has already been agreed on, which will come into effect from next year for large stores and 2015 for smaller shops such as newsagents, and if tobacco is being hidden then no one, child or adult, will be able to see the packets whether they are plain or decorated with flashing lights...

White also notes that plain packaging is likely to prove a counterfeiters charter (apparently "85% of cheap cigarettes sold on London streets" are fakes) and points out that cigarettes are already much harder for children to get hold of than alcohol, which may in fact be a greater problem.

But, of course, I very much doubt that the real goal of plain packaging laws is to protect children and stop impulse buying. In fact, it is probably just another measure designed to stigmatize smokers, and constantly remind them that the authorities regard their habit as shameful and sordid. You can say what you like about smoking and the tobacco industry, but I still don't think this is how government should treat grown-ups. Nor do I think it a legitimate basis for policymaking.

At some point, you have to say that enough is enough – and I'd suggest we've long since passed that point when it comes to tobacco control.

### Tom Clougherty



Tom Clougherty is managing editor at the Reason Foundation, a libertarian think tank with offices in Los Angeles and Washington, DC. Previously, he was executive director of the Adam Smith Institute.

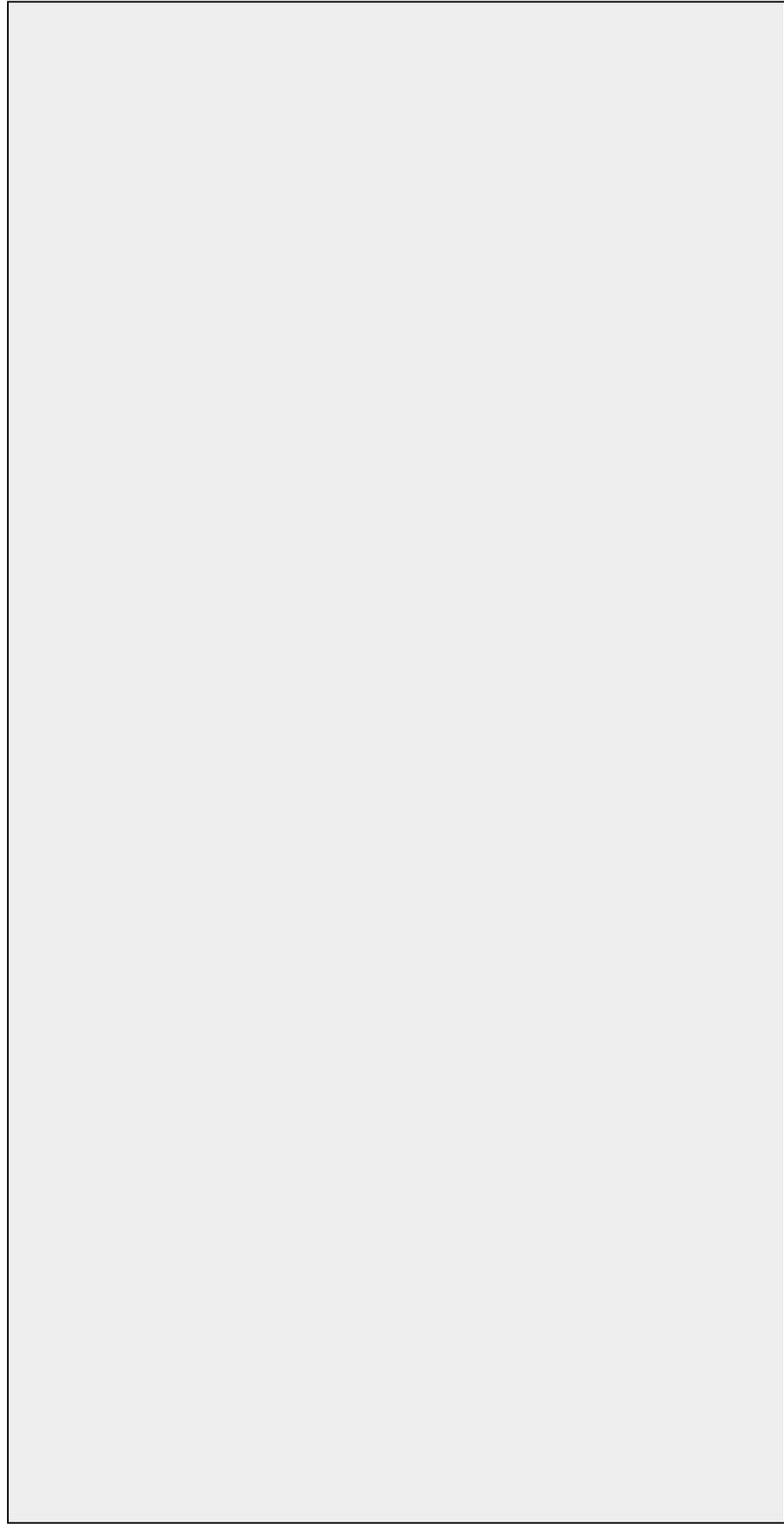
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