

CAMPAIGN For TOBACCO-FREE Kids®

Other Countries Ban the Use of Misleading Descriptors such as “Light” and “Low Tar” – Where is the United States?

Seventeen of the world's leading industrialized nations have taken affirmative action within the past 12 months to ban the use of misleading terms such as “light” and “low tar” on cigarettes sold in their countries. The National Cancer Institute's Monograph 13: *Risks Associated with Smoking Cigarettes with Low Machine-Yields of Tar and Nicotine*, provides the scientific basis for concluding that “light”, “low tar” and “ultra-light” tobacco products have not decreased the risk of tobacco related disease and that these terms have misled millions of smokers in the United States. Monograph 13 should lead the U.S. to ban the use of these terms, an action that is best accomplished by giving the Food and Drug Administration authority over tobacco, including the power to ban the use of misleading descriptors such as “light” and “low tar.”

Below are descriptions of the actions taken by other nations to ban misleading descriptors such as “light”, “ultra-light” and “low tar.”

Canada

On May 31, 2001 the Canadian Government called on the tobacco industry to voluntarily stop the use of misleading descriptors such as “light” and “low tar”. On November 1, 2001, the Canadian Health Minister released the report and findings of the Canadian Ministerial Expert Advisory Council on Tobacco Control, entitled “Findings of the International Expert Panel on Cigarette Descriptors” that recommended a total ban on the terms “light” and “low tar.” Further, upon releasing the report on November 1, the Canadian Health Minister announced he would proceed to ban these terms and that he is now determining how best to eliminate them from cigarettes sold in Canada.

European Union

In response to concerns that the terms “light”, “low tar”, and “mild” “mislead the consumer into the belief that such products are less harmful,” on June 5, 2001, the European Union (EU) issued a directive that bans all misleading descriptors on tobacco products. The exact language of the EU directive states, “With effect from 30 September 2003, and without prejudice to Article 5(1), texts, names, trademarks and figurative or other signs suggesting that a particular tobacco product is less harmful than others shall not be used on the packaging of tobacco products.”

Brazil

On March 28, 2001, the Agencia Nacional de Vigilancia Sanitaria (the national health agency of Brazil), issued a resolution prohibiting the use of “any type of descriptor” on tobacco products “produced, transported, marketed and/or stored on national territory or imported” in Brazil.

The exact language from the Brazilian resolution states, “It is prohibited to use any type of descriptor, on the packaging or in advertising material, such as: classes (s), ultra low tar, low tar, smooth, light, soft, leve, moderate tar, high or any others that could induce consumers to an erroneous interpretation as to the tar contained in cigarettes.”

The resolution will take effect November 28, 2001.