



Most New Zealand smokers support having fire-safe cigarettes: National survey data

A recent New Zealand study on cigarette fires and burns among New Zealand smokers,¹ has highlighted again yet another adverse consequence of nicotine addiction. The obvious long-term solution to this problem is to lower smoking prevalence by advancing comprehensive tobacco control measures (as previously advocated by injury researchers in New Zealand²). However, a more direct and supplementary option is for governments to mandate for fire-safe (or “reduced ignition propensity”) cigarettes as per Canada and various US states (including New York and California).^{3,4}

The potential techniques include preventing the use of fire accelerants in cigarette paper, and requiring ‘speed bumps’ or other means to stop cigarettes burning when not being used. There is evidence that such products can have consumer acceptability⁵ and do not increase the intensity of how cigarettes are smoked by users.⁶ There is also no evidence for tobacco industry assertions that fire-safe cigarettes might *increase* smoker carelessness,⁷ having any validity.

ESR scientists (for the Ministry of Health) and other New Zealand researchers have previously studied and made recommendations on this issue.^{8,9} Also, a member of parliament (and former fire-fighter) has promoted fire-safe cigarettes as a private members bill.¹⁰ Nevertheless, the issue seems to have lost momentum and we know of no recent developments within government agencies to advance this issue.

Between March 2007 and February 2008 we surveyed a national sample of 1376 New Zealand adult (18+ years) smokers. We asked if they knew whether the cigarettes they smoked were designed to reduce the risk of fires. Another question asked about attitudes towards such cigarettes: “Research has shown that fire-safe cigarettes are less likely to cause house fires than other cigarettes. Would you support a law for all factory-made cigarettes to be fire-safe?” Further detail on the survey methods is available elsewhere.¹¹

The results, weighted to reflect the national population of smokers in New Zealand, showed that a quarter of smokers (25.2%) thought they already smoked fire-safe cigarettes (with 54.8% saying “no” to this question and 19.4% indicating “can’t say”). A large majority of all the smokers surveyed (78.2%; 95% confidence interval=75.3% to 81.0%) support having a law for factory-made cigarettes to be fire-safe (with 18.4% saying “no”). These results are higher than for a previous New Zealand survey in 2003 that found that 67% of smokers and 68% of non-smokers support requirements for tailor-made cigarettes “to go out quickly when they are not being puffed”.⁹

Adoption of such a law is likely to reduce cigarette-related burns and deaths, as well as prevent fires that damage property and forests. It may also pave the way for other tobacco product regulation (e.g. for the removal of tobacco additives such as honey, and even the reduction of nicotine levels as part of a phase-out strategy). These are all

options that the New Zealand Government and the governments of other nations need to consider more seriously if they are to better protect their citizens from tobacco-related harm. Another private member's bill might be a good place for New Zealand to reactivate this issue.

Alternatively, the new Minister of Health could use powers under the Smoke-free Environments Act (s.31) to require fire accelerants be removed from cigarette paper.

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