



POSITION STATEMENT

Trading Standards

Supporting the ambition of a smoke free Wales – tackling illegal tobacco

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Trading Standards in Wales has an enforcement role to play in the control of supply of illegal tobacco. This is part of a wider multi-agency responsibility to reduce market share recognising that the availability of low-price tobacco products undermines other key tobacco control measures. Success in reducing market share of illegal tobacco will support the Welsh Government strategic objective for Wales to be smoke free by 2030.

GOVERNMENT AIMS, GOALS AND DRIVERS

- Smoking is the single biggest cause of premature death in Wales and the UK, and is responsible for over 5,500 deaths every year in Wales. Approximately 1 in 2 long term smokers will die early as a consequence of a smoking related disease. Reducing smoking prevalence is a key Welsh Government priority which has a long-term strategy to make Wales “smoke free” by 2030.
- There is a high cost associated with smoking both in terms of human misery and the financial burden on health services, employers and the wider economy.
- Currently 17% of adults in Wales are smokers. That is approximately 470,000 of the adult population.
- Prevalence rates vary within socio economic groups with those who can least afford to smoke recording the highest prevalence and smoking rates in our poorest areas and within the lowest socio –economic groups remaining stubbornly high.
- Smoking prevalence stands at 21% in the poorest areas compared to 13% in the most affluent. In addition, 9% of 15/16-year-olds are smoking on a regular basis, the same figure as it was four years ago.
- Smoking is a highly addictive habit and the vast majority of adult smokers became addicted whilst they were children. Those under 18 are most at risk of acquiring an addiction to tobacco smoking.

Tobacco Control

Tobacco Control is a holistic approach to reducing smoking prevalence which must identify and take account of the threats to reducing prevalence and deliver the many and various interventions deployed to reduce prevalence.

It is vital to recognise and understand every threat and how those threats impact and potentially undermine interventions designed to reduce prevalence. Failure to recognise and address such threats risks rendering other interventions less effective and wasting resources which will ultimately lead to failure to reduce prevalence.

Illegal Tobacco

Illegal tobacco is tobacco available for smokers to buy in Wales that is illegal for various reasons. The most fundamental illegality is that no tax is paid and consequently the cost of illegal tobacco is typically less than half the cost of legal tobacco. Illegal tobacco is supplied through the informal economy, from private houses, under the counter in convenience stores, in the workplace and on social media with no regard to any illegality. This includes selling to children.

The low cost and easy availability make it attractive to smokers on low incomes and makes young non-smokers more vulnerable to acquiring a lifelong addiction.

The most recent (2014) assessment of the market share of illegal tobacco in Wales indicates that 15% of tobacco smoked in Wales is illegal. At current prevalence levels and consumption rates this equates to approximately one million illegal cigarettes being smoked in Wales every day. The market share of illegal tobacco will be far higher in areas of highest deprivation. The same assessment indicated that 45% of smokers have been offered illegal tobacco and 70% of those who buy illegal tobacco in Wales say the availability of illegal tobacco makes it possible for them to smoke when they could not otherwise afford it.

Illegal tobacco is a very significant threat to reducing overall smoking prevalence and health inequalities. Affordability and availability undermine price control and cessation work. It makes it harder for existing smokers to quit and easier for them to smoke more. Affordability and availability also undermine age restriction and makes it easier for non-smoking young people to access tobacco and acquire a potentially lifelong addiction.

CONTRIBUTION TO THE AGENDA

Trading Standards Wales provides advice, guidance and support to all Trading Standards services in Wales on how each service can tackle illegal tobacco and contribute to Welsh Government strategic objectives.

Reducing the market share of illegal tobacco in Wales will reduce the threat it poses to other interventions designed to reduce prevalence and render those interventions more effective. This will support smokers trying to quit and will increase protection of young people from becoming addicted. Trading Standards will support this by:

Taking enforcement action against suppliers to end users with a view to maximising disruption, seizing stock, tackling landlords and prosecuting offenders where appropriate.

Using media releases to publicise local enforcement activity and deliver key health messages around smoking and the threat to children.

Using HMRC funding made to available to enhance enforcement activity.

Logging and sharing all intelligence to support the work of all enforcement agencies concerned with tackling illegal tobacco; HMRC, UKBF, Police.

Contributing at a strategic level to promote the issue of illegal tobacco with tobacco control partners, to improve understanding and raise awareness of the threat posed to strategic objectives around reducing smoking prevalence.

Evidence from other areas of the UK has demonstrated that market share of illegal tobacco can be reduced through a combination of interventions designed to reduce demand and restrict supply. This has involved market tested messaging to reduce demand and increase reporting along with additional enforcement support to act against suppliers. Interventions designed to tackle illegal tobacco in those areas have been externally reviewed and endorsed as best practice by the UK Centre for Tobacco and Alcohol Studies.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Reducing smoking prevalence in Wales must remain a top priority for Welsh Government.
2. Trading Standards Wales are committed to playing an active role in the development of the new Tobacco Control Plan for Wales that will take us to 2030.
3. The illegal tobacco market directly undermines the work being done to tackle the single biggest public health issue in Wales, smoking prevalence.
4. Tackling illegal tobacco should be fully embraced and resourced as part of a comprehensive tobacco control plan for Wales.
5. An updated assessment of the market share of illegal tobacco in Wales, similar to that carried out in 2014, should be funded and carried out as a matter of urgency.
6. Trading Standards Wales are committed to continue to share intelligence and best practice to support tackling the problems of illegal tobacco.

For further information please visit our website at: <https://tradingstandards.gov.wales/en/home/>

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