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Reduced fire risk cigarettes

British American Tobacco Australia supports new regulations regarding the manufacture of reduced fire risk (RFR) cigarettes and the end goal of reducing fires, but warns that no cigarette is fire safe.

The new regulations, which have been introduced by the Federal Government, mean that all cigarettes manufactured in Australia after the 23 March 2010 must be RFR compliant, as must products imported into Australia and those exported internationally.

Printed bands on the cigarette paper act like "speed bumps" to slow the burn. The bands are made of a thickening gum which reduces the air flow. If not actively smoked, the burning tobacco will reach the band and is more likely to go out. While RFR cigarettes are more likely to go out if left unattended, they are not fire safe.

The Regulations specify the testing method which involves placing a lit cigarette on a bundle of 10 pieces of laboratory filter paper and recording whether it self-extinguishes before burning completely down. To pass the test at least 75 per cent of the cigarettes tested must self-extinguish before burning down completely. Ordinary cigarettes fail this test.

Media reports suggesting BATA has sought to delay the introduction of RFR regulations are inaccurate. BATA has been actively involved in this process from its inception and co-operated with the relevant authorities on this change. Further, BATA has actually introduced RFR cigarettes in advance of the Government-mandated compliance date. =

RFR is the most significant change to cigarettes in more than 50 years and its introduction was the result of a long, detailed and necessarily comprehensive process. Throughout the process, BATA has stated that the irresponsible disposal of a lit cigarette that is RFR compliant could still be responsible for starting a bushfire. Any reports to the contrary are dangerous and risk giving consumers a false sense of security when it comes to the disposal of cigarettes.

RFR cigarettes were introduced in New York in 2004 and in Canada in late 2005. The limited evidence so far suggests that they may not have had a major impact on the number of accidental fires.

BATA's Area Head of Communications and CSR, Louise Warburton, said the introduction of RFR cigarettes may have unintended consequences.

"Smokers may be more careless if they think the cigarettes are "fire-safe" and will automatically extinguish," Ms Warburton said.

"Put simply, all cigarettes, including those that pass the new test, burn between 600-900°C and may cause fires if not carefully disposed of. We believe better public education on fire prevention, tougher regulation on furniture and clothing flammability plus improved fire detection and extinguisher regimes will help reduce all fires and their effects, not just those caused by cigarettes."

All cigarettes manufactured by BATA are currently RFR compliant. All non-compliant stock must be removed from the market by 23 September, 2010. There will be no change to the recommended retail price because of the Reduced Fire Risk regulations.

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