

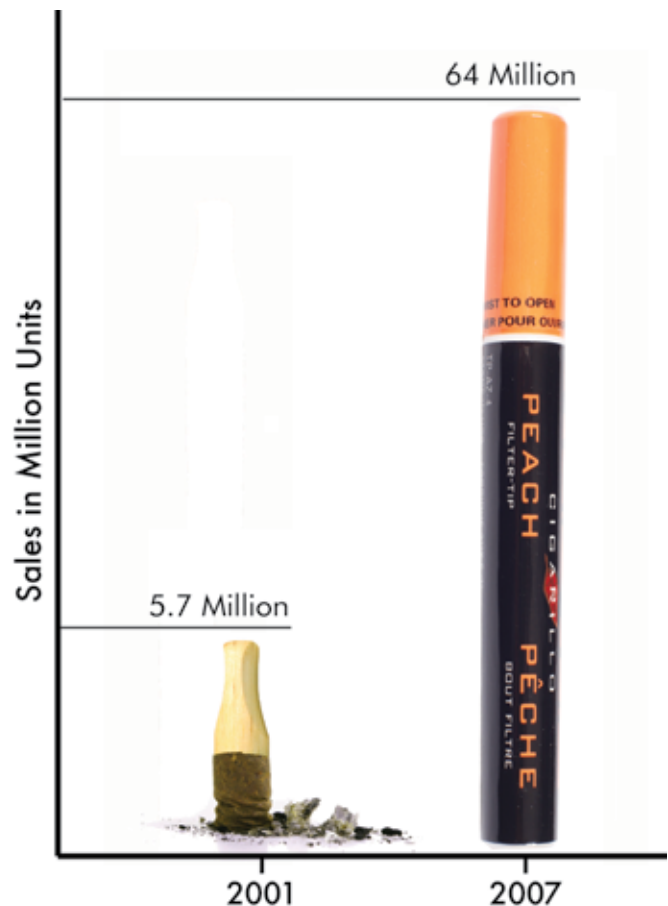
# Flavour Additives in Tobacco Products: *A Gateway to Tobacco Addiction*

*Tobacco use is the single most significant cause of preventable illness, disability and premature mortality in Alberta and Canada. An estimated \$1.8 billion is spent annually in Alberta on tobacco-related costs such as health care, worker absenteeism, and premature deaths.<sup>1</sup>*

The proliferation of tobacco products in Alberta, particularly candy-flavoured and exotic-flavoured tobacco products is a major public health concern due to their potential to contribute to increased smoking rates.<sup>2</sup>

In Alberta, chewing tobacco, snus, cigars, cigarillos,<sup>3</sup> and cigarettes are found in numerous candy-like flavours, with descriptors such as piña colada, lemon, chocolate, mint, berry, and vanilla, many of which have been shown to be especially alluring to youth.<sup>4</sup> In addition to overtly flavouring tobacco products, many additives are also skilfully used in indiscernible amounts to deliberately mask harshness and to increase the palatability of tobacco, encouraging the addiction to these products.

Flavouring additives have also been used by the tobacco industry to mask the smell of second-hand smoke to make it less objectionable to others.<sup>5</sup> Disguising the toxic emissions in second-hand smoke may prevent avoidance of exposure, which is particularly harmful for children. Children exposed to second-hand smoke are at an increased risk for sudden infant death syndrome, acute respiratory infections, ear problems, more severe asthma and stunted lung growth.<sup>6</sup>



**Figure 1: Alberta Cigarillo Sales by Million Units 2001-2007** (Health Canada)

**The rising popularity of cigarillos is of particular concern. Recent data from Health Canada indicates that cigarillo sales in Alberta increased over 1000% between 2001-2007, from 5.7 million units to over 64 million.<sup>7</sup>**

**Figure 2: Age distribution of individuals in Alberta who have used cigarillos in the past 30 days**

(Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey, Annual Results, 2007 – Public Use Micro Data File)



**Flavoured Tobacco a “Starter Product” that is Increasing in Popularity**

Progress in tobacco control has resulted in Alberta’s teen (15-19) smoking rate dropping from 26% in 1999 to 18% in 2008.<sup>8</sup> The increasing popularity of flavoured tobacco products such as cigarillos may severely compromise and potentially reverse progress in reducing tobacco use.

Internal tobacco industry documents confirm the importance of flavours in making tobacco use more palatable, explaining that “new users of smokeless tobacco -- attracted to the product for a variety of reasons -- are most likely to begin with products that are milder tasting, more flavoured, and/or easier to control in the mouth.”<sup>9</sup>

As Figure 2 indicates the vast majority of cigarillo users are teens and young adults. Approximately 35 per cent of teens in Grades 10 to 12 have tried cigarillos, mini-cigars or cigars.<sup>10</sup> That is almost double the current teen smoking rate.

Studies have shown that mentholated tobacco products also promote initiation in youth smoking.<sup>11</sup> Menthol has been called the ‘ultimate tobacco flavour’ as menthol smokers are 29% less likely to quit smoking, and 89% more likely to relapse when they do attempt.<sup>12</sup> A recent paper presented to the World Health Organization concluded that eliminating menthol from all tobacco products would result in a less-enjoyable smoking experience, and proposed that it would increase cessation rates and prevent initiation of new smokers.<sup>13</sup>

**Flavours Additives Safe When Consumed – Dangerous when Burned**

Some flavour additives are safe when consumed such as mint, sugar, and cocoa, but can become carcinogenic when burned in a tobacco product. Sweeteners and flavourings have properties that create a pharmacological effect in nicotine delivery, dilating the airways to allow the smoke an easier and deeper passage into the lungs, rapidly exposing the body to more nicotine and higher levels of tar.<sup>14</sup> This allows for quicker development of addiction to tobacco-derived nicotine.

**Lack of Flavour Additive Regulations**

Canada is a signatory of the World Health Organization’s Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC), the provisions of which include disclosure of ingredients and additives as well as regulation of the contents, emissions, and packaging and labelling of tobacco products.<sup>15</sup> To date, however, there has been limited public disclosure of information provided to Health Canada as mandated by the *Tobacco Reporting Regulations*.<sup>16</sup> In the absence of this public disclosure it is not possible to confirm the number, the variety, or the quantity of each flavour additive used in Canadian tobacco products, or to determine these additives on a brand-by-brand basis.

The Government of Ontario has banned the use of flavourings in cigarillos, and requires they be sold in packages of 20 units. The bill includes regulatory authority to ban flavours from other tobacco products.<sup>17</sup> A number of Australian states passed



## Conclusions

Flavorings in tobacco lead youth to start and maintain smoking. The use of flavour additives poses a significant threat to public health and the health of Alberta's youth. The burden of proof for a lack of toxicity or perpetuation of the tobacco epidemic should fall on the shoulders of the tobacco industry. The current regulatory framework in which flavored tobacco, especially cigarillos, is handled contributes to exacerbating the tobacco epidemic and specifically targets youth.

## Recommendations

1. Mandatory disclosure of all ingredients in tobacco products, on a brand-by-brand basis.
2. A ban on all flavour additives. Barring a complete ban, a ban on any flavour additive that may be an inducement to tobacco use, promotes experimentation, helps sustain addiction (in any fashion), that causes negative health effects when consumed or combusted, or masks the smell of second-hand smoke.
3. Mandatory health warnings on all tobacco products including cigarillos and cigars.
4. Requirements that cigarillos be sold in packages of no fewer than 20 units.
5. A ban on all new tobacco products. An exception could be made for products that were unequivocally demonstrated to not be detrimental to public health.

regulation in 2006 banning the use of flavoured tobacco, while 38 American States have banned RJ Reynolds from selling any tobacco product with candy, fruit, or alcohol flavours. Bill 1108 is also in progress in the United States which would envelope tobacco regulation within the Food and Drug Administration (FDA).

The Alberta Medical Association advocates for the regulation of all flavourings in tobacco, including menthol.

## Packaging of Cigarillos

Unlike cigarettes, which cannot be sold in packages with fewer than 20 units, cigarillos can be sold individually and without health warning messages, increasing the affordability and accessibility of these products to youth.

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- 1 "The Costs of Substance Abuse in Canada in 2002," Canadian Centre on Substance Abuse. March 2006.
  - 2 Greg N Connolly. "Sweet and Spicy Flavours: new brands for minority and youth," Tobacco Control 2004; 13, 211.
  - 3 Under Canadian law, the distinction between tobacco products and cigarettes are made based on the wrapping. If the tobacco is wrapped in paper made from tobacco leaves it is categorized as 'cigarillos', while those which are wrapped in paper made from trees, are called 'cigarettes'. These little cigars have a weight of 1.4 grams per unit, excluding the weight of a mouthpiece where applicable.
  - 4 Connolly.
  - 5 Connolly, et al. Tobacco Control 2000; 9: 283-291.
  - 6 "The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke: A Report of the Surgeon General," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2006.
  - 7 Health Canada "Gathering Evidence to Support a Flavoured Tobacco Products Ban (Alberta)," Unpublished. Email Sent February 9, 2009.
  - 8 Statistics Canada, Canadian Tobacco Use Monitoring Survey (CTUMS), Overview of Historical Trends 1999-2008
  - 9 U.S. Smokeless Tobacco Company (USSTC), manufacturer of the most popular smokeless tobacco products in Alberta.
  - 10 Statistics Canada.
  - 11 Jennifer M. Kreslake, Geoffrey Ferris Wayne, Hillel R. Alpert, Howard Koh, Gregory N. Connolly, "Tobacco industry control of menthol in cigarettes and targeting of adolescents and young adults," American Journal of Public Health 2008; 98(9), 1685.
  - 12 Mark J. Pletcher, Benjamin J. Hulley; Thomas Houston, Catarina I. Kiefe, Neal Benowitz, Stephen Sidney, "Menthol Cigarettes, Smoking Cessation, Atherosclerosis, and Pulmonary Function," Arch Intern Med. 2006; 166: 1915-1922.
  - 13 Pamela Clark, Suma Babu, Eva Sharma, "Menthol Cigarettes: What do we know?" Background paper presented to the World Health Organisation, University of Maryland, November 2008.
  - 14 Bates C, Connolly GN, Jarvis M. "Tobacco Additives/Cigarette Engineering and Nicotine Addiction", ASH London, July 14, 1999 <<http://old.ash.org.uk/html/regulation/html/additives.html>>.
  - 15 Framework Convention on Tobacco Control Articles 9, 10, 11. <<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/tobac-tabac/legislation/reg/indust/constitu-index-eng.php>>.
  - 16 Tobacco manufacturers and importers must provide Health Canada with annual reports which include their sales data, manufacturing information, tobacco product ingredients, toxic constituents, toxic emissions, research activities and promotional activities. Information on select constituents and emissions is available. <<http://www.hc-sc.gc.ca/hl-vs/tobac-tabac/legislation/reg/indust/constitu-eng.php>>.
  - 17 "Tobacco Smoke Components: Carcinogens," Physicians for a Smoke Free Canada, March 1999. <<http://www.smoke-free.ca/factsheets/pdf/Carcinogens.PDF>>.