

Government Proposes Ban on Cigarette Ads by 2012

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Putin's program aims to reduce the number of adult smokers by a quarter. **Igor Tabakov**

Tobacco advertising, currently only allowed in some printed and indoor media, would be banned by 2012, according to a lengthy document published on the official Government.ru web site. Tobacco ads on outdoor billboards were banned in 2007.

Prime Minister Vladimir Putin approved the anti-smoking program on Sept. 23, his press service said, which aims to cut the number of adult smokers by a quarter between 2010 and 2015, and reduce smoking-related diseases and deaths.

Up to half a million people die from smoking-related causes a year in Russia, whose population, the United Nations says, could shrink to 116 million by 2050 from 142 million now.

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The program also proposes a ban on smoking in public places such as offices, theaters and public transportation, including long-distance trains, by 2015.

Though a total ban on closed spaces is proposed, the document says restaurants and bars — most of which currently do not have nonsmoking areas — could be excluded.

About 80 percent of Russians are exposed to passive smoking daily, and 40 percent of women smokers continue the habit through pregnancy, the document said.

Russia's love affair with tobacco will be hard to break. In 1990, a shortage of domestic cigarettes led to a "tobacco rebellion" on the streets of the biggest cities, forcing the Soviet government to appeal for an international emergency shipment.

In June, the Health and Social Development Ministry forced manufacturers to put anti-smoking messages on cigarette packs, warning of lung cancer, wrinkles and impotence, adopting standards similar to those in the European Union.

Russia remains one of the world's top tobacco clients, however, with 409 billion cigarettes produced in Russia last year, according to the Association of Tobacco Producers.

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