

Tobacco giants' cash incentives under fire

Health Ministry launches probe into rebates used to encourage retailers

by Martin Johnston
health reporter

The Ministry of Health is investigating the rebates tobacco companies pay retailers to stock their products.

The ministry told the *Herald* yesterday it would investigate "the issue of tobacco companies providing incentives to retailers to sell and display tobacco".

At Wednesday's meeting of Parliament's health select committee, the Association of Convenience Stores told MPs retailers received "standard trade rebates" from tobacco companies.

The ministry said: "Section 28 (2) of the Smoke-free Environments Act (1990) bans any gift or cash rebate as an inducement or reward to any retailer for the purchase, sale, advertising or placement of tobacco products."

The association's statement to MPs was confirmed by committee chairwoman Sue Kedgley, the Cancer Society's Action on Smoking and Health (Ash), and the association's

THE ASSOCIATION

- The Association of Convenience Stores represents more than 765 businesses.
- Its members are mostly convenience stores associated with petrol companies.
- A number of product suppliers are also "premier" members, including Imperial Tobacco, British American Tobacco, Phillip Morris and Cadbury.

executive director, David Killeen.

But association chairman Bryce Taylor said the society and Ash had taken the presentation out of context.

And in an apparent contradiction of the ministry's view, Mr Killeen said: "The act does allow normal trade rebates. We are not talking about incentives to put [tobacco products] in particular positions."

He said the rebates tobacco companies paid to retailers were the same

DISPLAYS ENCOURAGE TEEN SMOKERS

Teens who regularly visit shops where packets of cigarettes are displayed for all to see are at increased risk of taking up smoking, a new study shows.

"This is evidence that these displays are associated with smoking," said one of the researchers, Dr Janine Paynter, of the Action on Smoking and Health (Ash) anti-tobacco group.

Retailers are permitted to have point-of-sale displays of 100 packets of cigarettes and 40 cartons, but generally not next to confectionery or other products marketed mainly to children.

The study, presented to the Public Health Association conference in

Waitangi yesterday, is drawn from a wider Ash smoking survey of 29,000 Year 10 students. It looked at their visits to stores with tobacco displays and their risk of taking up smoking.

Comparing students who visited stores daily with those who visited less than weekly, the study found that the likelihood of experimenting with smoking was almost tripled. Visiting twice or three times a week doubled the likelihood of trying smoking.

The 2007 Ash survey found that 12.8 per cent smoked at least monthly and 7.3 per cent were daily smokers.

— Martin Johnston

as those paid by confectionery suppliers.

"If you agree to sell so many brands of their product, they give you certain rebates... The rebate is associated with the decision to purchase a particular brand. It's got nothing to do with display."

He acknowledged that tobacco advertising was not permitted, but said displays were not advertisements.

The committee was hearing sub-

missions on a petition calling for retail tobacco displays to be banned.

The ministry, separately, is considering proposals to ban the displays, add further restrictions short of a ban, or simply enhance education and enforcement of the current law.

Mr Killeen said changes to put tobacco out of customers' sight would cost \$6000 to \$8000 at each store and could frustrate shoppers unable to find the brand they wanted quickly.



WALL TO WALL: MPs are debating whether cigarette displays should be banned.

half-yearly
clearance

Massive savings throughout the store

SAVE

Colour alerts birds to foreign eggs

by Angela Gregory

Some birds are skilled at detecting imposters' eggs in their nests because they recognise that the shell colour is suspect, says an international research team that included New Zealand scientists.

The researchers — from the University of Auckland, the University of Birmingham and two Czech institutions, the Academy of Science and the Palacky University — suggest that some birds use colour to identify eggs of other species and eject them.

Dr Mark Hauber, of Auckland University's School of Biological Sciences, said the research showed song thrushes recognised small changes, particularly in ultraviolet wavelengths, and used these to distinguish between their own eggs and eggs of "parasite" species such as cuckoos.

"Birds have very different visual senses to humans — they can see ultraviolet wavelengths where we cannot."

He said the study introduced eggs painted in a range of colours from blue overtones to reddish tints into the nests of song thrushes. The birds rejected the

eggs that showed differences in the reflecting of ultraviolet or short (blue) wavelength light.

Dr Hauber said birds such as cuckoos which parasitically introduced their eggs into the nest of other birds dramatically increased the amount of time and energy needed to provision the nest.

He said that even though the artificially coloured eggs had come from the female song thrushes, the birds still ejected them because of subtle differences from their natural colouring.

The research was published online this week in *Biology Letters*.

Dr Hauber told the *Herald* that previous research had looked into the way birds perceived colours in feathers, fruits and insects, but not eggs.

It was suspected that birds could recognise healthy eggs by their colour.

An antioxidant, biliverdin, was responsible for blue-coloured eggs and it was thought the brighter the blue the more likely the egg would produce a healthy chick.

Dr Hauber said it was possible birds could eject less-healthy-looking eggs to increase survival rates.