

Majority of UK smokers buy illegal tobacco, survey finds

By James Badger | 4 April 2022

The majority of UK smokers admitted to buying illegal tobacco in the last year, says a new survey.

The research, carried out by the Tobacco Manufacturers Association (TMA), found 71% of consumers were buying products illegally.

The study also discovered 20% of consumers claimed they only purchased illicit branded tobacco.

Since 2016, it has been illegal for brands to sell cigarettes and rolling tobacco in distinctive, brightly coloured packaging. However, illicit branded products are readily available for purchase through social media or on the internet.



Purchasing the products illegally means the required 16.5% UK duty on the retail price is not paid.

According to the most recent HMRC tax gap data, the consumption and importation of illicit tobacco accounts for £2.45bn in lost revenue each year.

The practice also has a significant negative impact on independent retailers, who derive 34% of their income from the sale of tobacco products.

Despite the worrying trend, 68% of respondents saw no issue with purchasing illegal products.

“It is astounding that six years after ‘branded’ tobacco was prohibited from sale in the UK (i.e. non-plain packaged) one in five smokers surveyed still only purchase ‘branded’ cigarettes or roll-your-own tobacco,” said Rupert Lewis, director of the TMA.

“The 2021 findings highlight the continued widespread availability of illicit tobacco, as well as the entrenched perception among many consumers that it is ‘acceptable’ to trade or buy illicit tobacco.

“To address the challenge of illicit tobacco, I believe that ‘we’, meaning government, law enforcement, industry and retail, must double down on our efforts and take the fight to those who bring about such misery through trading and supplying illicit tobacco.”

Source: <https://www.thegrocer.co.uk/convenience/majority-of-uk-smokers-buy-illegal-tobacco-survey-finds/666224.article#:~:text=The%20majority%20of%20UK%20smokers,consumers%20wer%20buying%20products%20illegally>