

Background

Using the TPackSS systematic protocol,¹ cigarette packs were purchased across five cities in Mexico (Mexico City, Guadalajara, León, Durango, and Mérida) during October–November 2021.

191 unique cigarette packs that displayed legally-mandated Mexican health warning labels (HWLs) were systematically assessed for compliance with key requirements of the Mexican administrative rule.² The main compliance requirements were: warning location, warning size, warning label elements, and pictogram implementation.

An additional 70 unique packs had out-of-rotation Mexican HWLs and six did not have a Mexican HWL.

All packs had the warnings in the correct location and followed the sets established by the administrative rule,² and the majority had the correct warning elements. Yet, we observed the following areas of concern:

Insufficient Coverage



Some front and (mainly) side HWLs covered a **smaller** area than required by the legislation. The majority of these noncompliant packs had **beveled or round edges** (pictured). Pack shape and size can lead to poor HWL implementation, especially if the warnings were not designed with different shapes in mind.



Less than 30% front warning coverage due to shape

Less than 100% side warning coverage due to beveled edges

HWL compliance requires 30% coverage on the front and 100% coverage on one side and back.

Pictogram Implementation



The packs below are not compliant because the pictograms were graphically altered from how they were intended to appear.



Identical source image appears cropped (left: zoomed in; right: zoomed out)

Yellow text atop light-colored photo is illegible due to missing black outline



Pictograms are to be printed on the front of the pack exactly as shown in the administrative rule—without modification.² This includes text in yellow with black outline.

Out-of-Rotation Warning



Cigarette packs containing out-of-rotation warnings used “sleeves” to conceal their noncompliance.



The noncompliant, out-of-rotation HWL on a cigarette pack (top right) is covered by an outer sleeve featuring an in-rotation HWL (bottom right)

The Mexican legislation requires that only in-rotation HWLs be printed on all tobacco product packages.³



Policy Implications

While we observed an overall good compliance in Mexico in October–November 2021, the areas of concern highlight opportunities for strengthening the implementation of the required health warning labels and improve their effectiveness:

- ✓ **Creating and enforcing stronger packaging regulations** is essential given that packaging exposes users to its messages before, during and after use, making it a valuable communication tool.
- ✓ The different pack shapes and HWL implementation issues found in this 2021 collection raise the need for the **adoption of plain and standardized packaging** (pictured, left) along with **bigger HWLs** in Mexico.
- ✓ **Enforcing penalties for non-compliant companies**, as established in the Mexican legislation, could also help support better HWL implementation.

Additional Context

Mexico’s health warning label requirements during data collection were as follows:

1. 30% front pictogram coverage, 100% back and side HWL message coverage
2. Black text warning on yellow background on the side and back of packs
3. Four sets of unique pictograms with corresponding back and side text HWL, all in Spanish (between Dec. 1, 2020 and Feb. 28, 2022)



Article 11 of the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) guidelines for implementation recommend the use of pictorial warnings that cover 50% or more of the front and back of the pack.

Mexico’s HWLs fulfill current FCTC minimum requirements, but *not* best-practice recommendations.

In 2021, Mexico’s HWL size ranked 28th globally,⁴ marking a decline from its previous ranking.⁵

References

1. Smith K, Washington C, Brown J, Vadnais A, Kroart L, Ferguson J, Cohen J. The Tobacco Pack Surveillance System: A Protocol for Assessing Health Warning Compliance, Design Features, and Appeals of Tobacco Packs Sold in Low- and Middle-income Countries. *JMIR Public Health Surveill.* 2015;1(2). doi: [10.2196/publichealth.4616](https://doi.org/10.2196/publichealth.4616).
2. SEGOB. Diario Oficial de la Federación. ACUERDO por el que se da a conocer la serie de leyendas, imágenes, pictogramas, mensajes sanitarios e información que deberá figurar en todos los paquetes de productos del tabaco y en todo empaquetado y etiquetado externo de los mismos, a partir del 1 de junio de 2020 y hasta el 30 de noviembre de 2021. Available from: <https://www.dof.gob.mx>.
3. SEGOB. Diario Oficial de la Federación. Ley General para el Control de Tabaco en México. Available from: http://www.conadic.salud.gob.mx/pdfs/ley_general_tabaco.pdf.
4. Canadian Cancer Society. *Cigarette Package Health Warnings: International Status Report, Seventh Edition, October 2021.*
5. Canadian Cancer Society. *Cigarette Package Health Warnings: International Status Report, Fifth Edition, October 2016.*

Plain Packaging

Learn more about steps that can be taken to advance plain and standardized packaging in Mexico with IGTC’s report and one-pager containing evidence-based recommendations for effective plain packaging policy making.

