

# SmokeLess New Zealand

[www.smokeless.org.nz](http://www.smokeless.org.nz) [info@smokeless.org.nz](mailto:info@smokeless.org.nz)

Printer friendly version [www.smokeless.org.nz/casestudyMay07.pdf](http://www.smokeless.org.nz/casestudyMay07.pdf)

## How 80,000 smokers quit and then relapsed 3 months later A case study in tobacco control policy

**The intervention.** In May 2000, around the time of the first Budget of the Clark government, the three of the most powerful tobacco control policies impinged on smokers:

A tobacco tax increase - resulting in a 20% increase in price, was notified and implemented overnight.

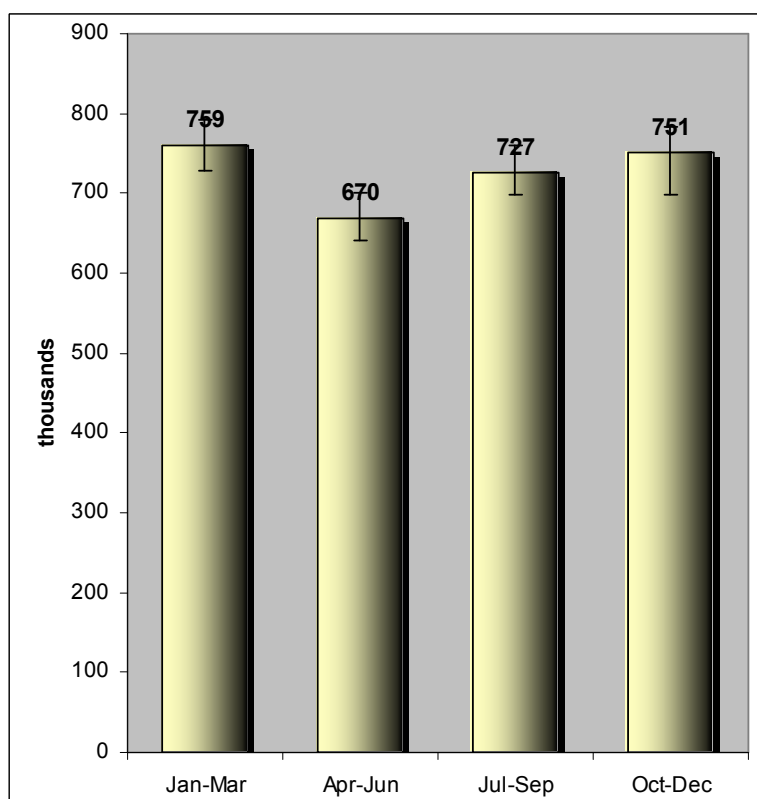
A new set of varied health warnings, including SMOKING KILLS appeared on tobacco packets for the first time.

Maximum use of the most powerful television commercial in the *Every cigarette is doing you damage* series, *the Aorta*.

### Results.

- Angry smokers besieged the toll-free Quitline.
- Some 80,000 smokers quit smoking for at least 4 months.
- Smoking prevalence was significantly decreased for the middle 6 months of 2000.<sup>1</sup>

**Figure 1. Smoking population, any cigarette, New Zealand 2000, quarterly data.**



The error bars show the 95% confidence interval of the smoking population estimate. (any type of cigarette).

Source: AC Nielsen and Roy Morgan Research data combined.

In April to June the smoking population was significantly less than in the other quarters. ( $p < 0.001$ )

In quarters 2 and 3 taken together, the smoking population was significantly less than for quarters 1 and 4 combined. ( $p < 0.001$ )

### Why did conventional tobacco control measures result in 80,000 smokers becoming quitters, only to relapse?

The effect was temporary, as after a few months, smokers, with no other source of a nicotine fix, had to return to smoking if they wanted that nicotine hit again. The cigarette manufacturers had the monopoly of the nicotine supply.

This large scale relapse was not unexpected given that smoking causes a recurrent relapsing chronic nicotine addiction. However, did they need to relapse to smoking? Could they have been kept addicted on nicotine?

Government subsidised nicotine patches and gum via the Quitline from late 2000, but these products are not strong enough for many smokers, and are typically used for weeks rather than months, so cravings resurfaced and relapses to smoking terminated this massive achievement in persuading so many smokers to quit.

**Conclusion:**

- The comprehensive policy, when coordinated, successfully persuades smokers to quit smoking, but fails to stop them relapsing.
- If fast-acting nicotine products (pure nicotine or snuff had been available at a competitive price in all cigarette shops, in flavours smokers liked, it is likely that many of the 80,000 would have had their cravings suppressed, and instead of switching to cheaper RYO cigarettes, would have switched off smoking for good.

**Government needs a more comprehensive policy to end smoking, one that acknowledges that**

- 1) most smokers are addicted to nicotine, and need a steady supply of it to prevent relapse to smoking.
- 2) many more smokers (from among the 3/4 million who have not yet quit) will avoid fatal diseases if they can keep their nicotine addiction – but without smoking.
- 3) The price signals and NZ smokers traditional use of RYOs favour this form of tobacco use.

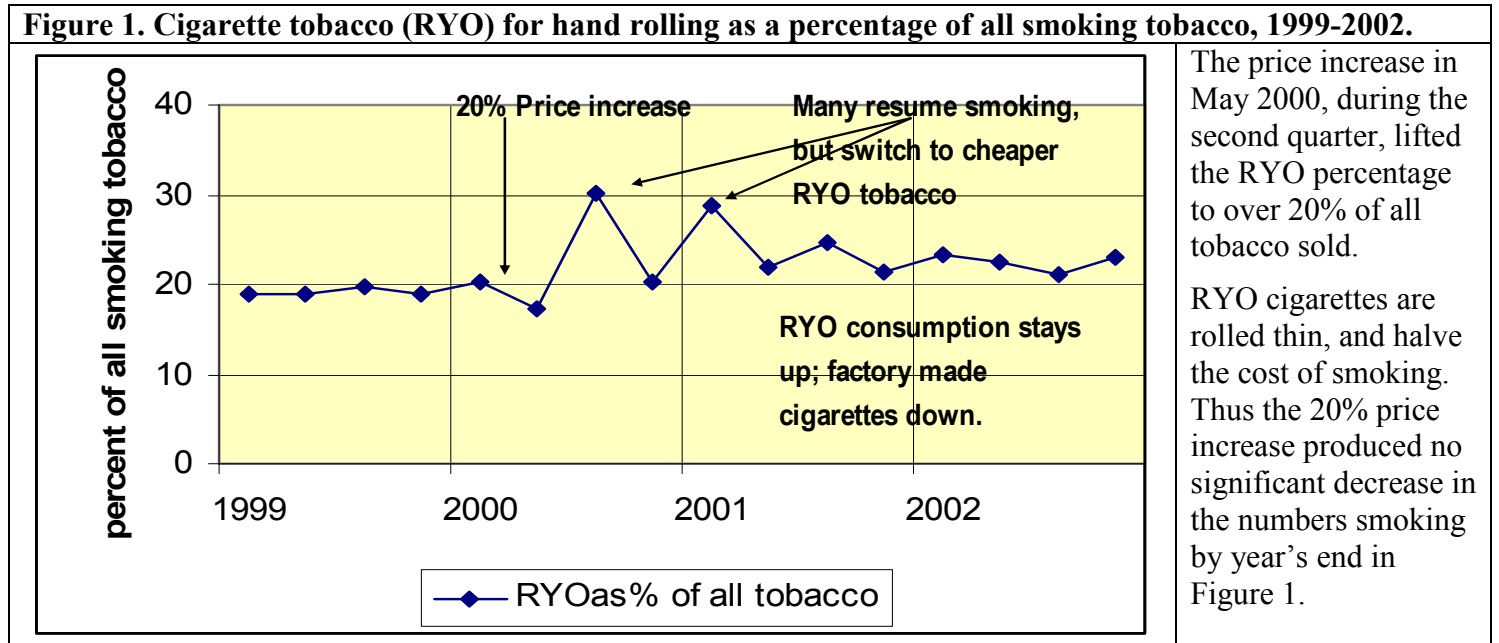
Factory made (FM) cigarettes cost \$10 a day.

RYO tobacco costs \$4 a day. (Tax on RYO tobacco should double before tax on FM cigarettes is increased.)

Nasal snuff costs \$4 a day. (The tax rate should be reduced 90%)

Nicotine gum, patches and lozenges, 95% subsidized by government, costing \$5 for two weeks supply.

Faster-acting nicotine products are being researched.



1 The smoking prevalence in the second quarter of 2000 was significantly below the first quarter, and below the third and fourth quarters (p<0.001). Quarters 2 and 3 combined were significantly below quarters 1 and 4 combined (p<0.001).

2. Data from Laugesen M. Health New Zealand Ltd. Unpublished report to NIHS 2002.

