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'Image warnings on cigarette packs ineffective'

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MUMBAI: Pictorial warnings on cigarette packs and other tobacco products are largely ineffective and don't convey ill effects of tobacco consumption, a study has found.

Researchers from the non-governmental organisation, Healis Sekhsaria Institute for Public Health, interviewed 615 people, including 136 smokers, across the city in September.

It was found that many of them made bizarre interpretations of the pictures the government had made mandatory in May this year to discourage tobacco consumption.

Many took the scorpion's image represented a zodiac sign and a picture of diseased lungs to be that of burnt leaves.



■ Figures A, B and C are the pictorial warnings that are printed on tobacco product packets. Figures D and E are the warnings that the state had earlier proposed, that could be have more effective.

Over 50 per cent of respondents did not realise that the image of the x-ray of lungs was meant to show ill effects of smoking.

"They made unscientific connections of the picture and thought that it was a waterfall between mountains or a butterfly," said Healis director Dr P.C. Gupta.

Over 25 per cent of those surveyed felt that these images did not stop anybody from using tobacco products and over 49 per cent said pictures showing

mouth cancer and a diseased human face, which were originally proposed by the government, would have been more effective in conveying the message.

The findings have been submitted to the Health Ministry with a request to impose stronger pictorial warnings.

Healis also bought around 25 different tobacco products to see if warnings on them complied with a government notification under the Cigarettes and other Tobacco Products (pro-

hibition of advertisements and regulation of trade and commerce, production and distribution) Act 2003. It was found that most warnings occupied less than the 40 per cent of the pack as mandated.

Dr Gupta said the warnings need to be in local languages so that people understand them.

"The law is ambiguous about the language of warning so most tobacco firms are getting away by using only English which some people don't understand," he said.