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**Tobacco control activists speak out against lifestyle event by Tobacco company**

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## **TOBACCO CONTROL ACTIVISTS SPEAK OUT AGAINST LIFESTYLE EVENT BY TOBACCO COMPANY**

**Pune(Voice News Service):-** Speak against the use of Cigarette brand name for showcasing Fashion Week n an effort to highlight yet another blatant violation by tobacco companies in advertising their brands in a surrogate move, tobacco control activists have slammed ITC Ltd. for sponsoring the Wills India Fashion Week under the well-known Wills brand name, which already has a strong association with cigarettes.

The Wills India Fashion Week is held under the Wills Lifestyle brand extension of ITC. Although it is an entirely different line of business from ITC's tobacco related businesses, the extension of the brand name to their clothing line, and by effect to this fashion week, it has become amply clear that this is no more than a massive brand building effort for the Wills brand. Speaking on the issue, Dr. P.C.Gupta, Director, Healis Sekhsaria Institute for Public Health, said, "We condemn such acts of endorsing cigarette brands through such seemingly inoffensive platforms. The youth of today aspire to have a fashionable lifestyle, and fashion weeks such as this provide a platform for the youth to get hooked to the latest trends in fashion and lifestyle. By naming this event under the Wills brand name, ITC Ltd is clearly trying to associate smoking with a fashionable lifestyle, influencing many non-smoking youths to take up smoking as a socially acceptable habit. " In recent news reports regarding the turnover of ITC Ltd., comments by officials from Wills Lifestyle have confirmed that this brand line contributes to a mere fraction of profits for ITC - clearly signifying that this brand extension is no more than a large scale initiative to build acceptance and recognition for the Wills brand. ITC is cleverly circumventing the ban on direct advertising of tobacco. It is becoming increasingly vital for authorities to not only realize how tobacco companies are circumventing advertising rules, but more importantly to understand the magnitude of public health risks that these companies stand to create through such brand building initiatives targeted at the urban youth in the country. Bringing about a ban on surrogate advertising is an important move, as it would limit the exposure of the youth to tobacco brands, and thereby give a shot in the arm to public health in the county.