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Discount Cigarettes



Key Messages

- The smoke from discount cigarettes contains the same chemicals, in similar concentrations, as the smoke from premium cigarettes.
- Smoking discount cigarettes poses the same risk of harmful health effects as smoking other Canadian cigarettes.

Background

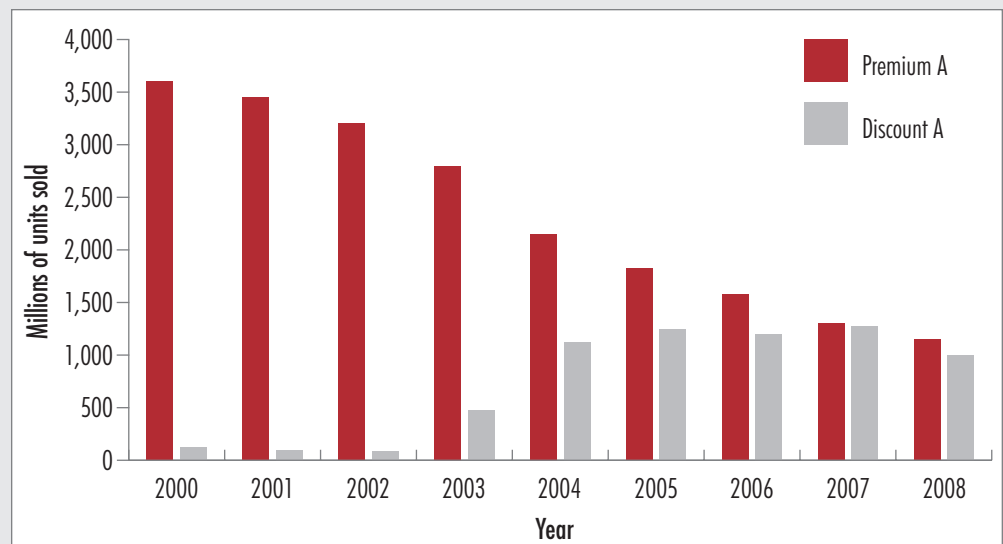
Over the last decade, (2000–2010), price competition between cigarette manufacturers has resulted in a significant number of “discount” cigarettes being introduced to the market. These cheaper brands have become increasingly popular with Canadian smokers and have gained considerable market share from premium brands. Discount cigarettes are defined as cigarettes sold at a price below the average unit wholesale price, while premium cigarettes are defined as cigarettes sold at a price

above the average unit wholesale price.

Figure 1 illustrates how the sales of a discount brand increased for one manufacturer while the sales of one of its premium brands decreased over a few years.

The availability of cheaper cigarettes has raised concerns about their impact on public health. Evidence has shown that “individuals have switched to lower-priced discount brands rather than quitting smoking or decreasing the number of cigarettes smoked.”¹

Figure 1: Total unit wholesale sales² in Canada of a discount and a premium brand from the same manufacturer, 2000–2008



Tobacco smoke contains over 4,000 different chemicals that are formed when tobacco burns. At least 60 of these are known to be cancer causing.

To assess the potential health impacts of discount cigarettes, Health Canada characterized and compared selected discount and premium brands.

Results

Physical characteristics and tobacco composition are shown in **Table 1** for one discount and premium brand. The choice of brand was based on declared tar value. No statistically significant difference in length, diameter, tobacco weight, ventilation, tobacco pH, smoke PH and nicotine content per cigarette was observed between premium and discount cigarettes. In addition, both types contain the same additives.

Table 1: Comparison of physical characteristics and tobacco composition² of a discount and a premium cigarette brand from the same manufacturer

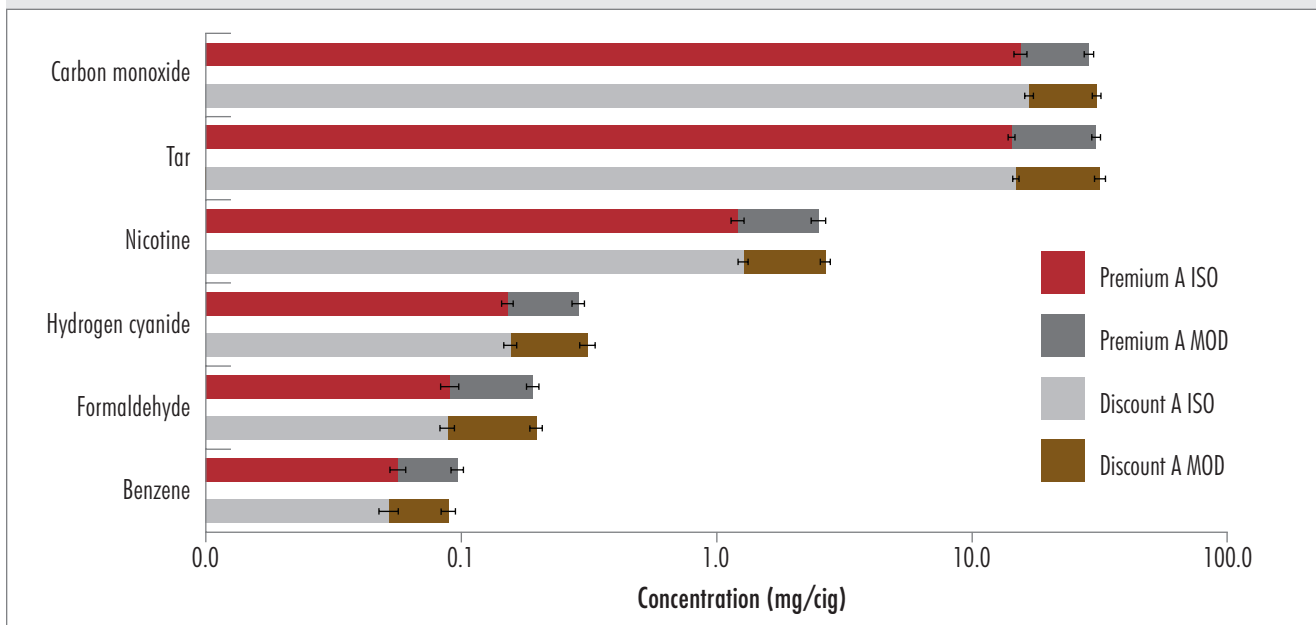
	Premium A	Discount A
Total length (mm)	83.9 ± 0.2	84.0 ± 0.1
Average diameter (mm)	7.9 ± 0.1	7.9 ± 0.2
Tobacco weight (mg/cig)	782 ± 10	797 ± 10
Filter ventilation	None	None
Tobacco pH	5.3	5.3
Smoke pH	6.01 ± 0.04	5.78 ± 0.07
Nicotine content (mg/cig)	11.9 ± 0.6	12.5 ± 0.5
Triacetin ^a (µg/cig)	46.4 ± 0.7	53 ± 2

^a Triacetin is added to the filter to stiffen it.

Health Canada compared discount and premium cigarettes and found that the same chemicals are present in the smoke of both types of cigarettes. The amount of six significant chemicals is shown

in **Figure 2**. Comparable amounts of these chemicals are found in the smoke of discount and premium cigarettes.

Figure 2: Concentration of selected emissions of a discount and a premium brand from the same manufacturer



ISO: Data collected under ISO smoking conditions

MOD: Data collected under Health Canada modified smoking conditions

In addition, toxicity tests confirmed that the smoke of the discount cigarettes, like all cigarettes, is mutagenic (causes mutation in DNA), cytotoxic (affects cell structure and its components) and genotoxic (causes structural changes in chromosomes).

Conclusions

Discount and premium cigarettes have the same physical characteristics, similar smoke composition and can cause harmful health effects. Health Canada considers that smoking, whether discount or premium cigarettes, poses a significant risk to the smoker's health.

References

1. Diener, A., Ahmed, R., Kaiserman, M. and Farnworth, M.. 2007. *Examining the Effects of Tax Increases on Discount and Premium Cigarettes in Canada, 2001–2005*. iHEA 2007 6th World Congress: Explorations in Health Economics Paper. Accessed September 29, 2010.
<http://ssrn.com/abstract=995074>
2. Health Canada. June 2000. *Tobacco Reporting Regulations*, SOR-2000/273, P.C.2000-1040. Ottawa.