

# Using MPOWER policies to address tobacco impact on the environment

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It is now well established that the entire tobacco production and consumption chain harms the environment.(1-10) Although research continues to emerge documenting the extent of the negative impact of tobacco products, as well as electronic nicotine delivery systems and electronic non-nicotine delivery systems, on the environment, and the associated costs of this impact, the evidence is sufficient to warrant a discussion of a range of policies to mitigate current and prevent future harms to the environment caused by these products.

The tobacco industry, cognizant of the growing awareness and concern with the environmental impact of its products has launched a series of initiatives and campaigns allegedly to address this concern. (7,11) However, as with several other voluntary tobacco industry initiatives, these appear to be public relations and corporate social responsibility marketing initiatives, with no real impact on reducing the source of the environmental pollutant: tobacco products.

Article 18 of the World Health Organization Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (WHO FCTC) addresses the environmental harms of tobacco, although to date its implementation has been focused on tobacco growing countries, its applicability should be to all Parties of the Convention (12) since environmental harm is not constricted by tobacco growing and leaf processing, but by all other steps of the supply and consumption chain including tobacco products manufacturing, distribution, use and the creation of tobacco product waste. Principle 5 of the Policy options and recommendations on economically sustainable alternatives to tobacco growing (in relation to articles 17 and 18 of the WHO FCTC) specifically addresses tobacco industry's liability for environmental harms. (13) In addition to Article 18, Article 19.5 of the WHO FCTC addresses the potential for Parties to use the legal system to deal with tobacco industry's liability for harms caused, (14) which could potentially include harms to the environment.

Several policies have been proposed to ensure that the tobacco industry be held accountable for the environmental harms of

its products. (1,3,6,7) Additionally, the MPOWER package of policies that support the implementation of WHO FCTC policies to reduce the demand for tobacco products could also be deployed in support of reducing the environmental harms of tobacco. For example:

M: Monitor tobacco product waste, environmental impact of tobacco, and the tobacco industry's attempts to "greenwash" their data. (11) Governments need objective data about the environmental impact of the tobacco industry.

P: Extend smoke and tobacco-free environments to outdoor areas, including parks and beaches, to prevent tobacco product waste from contaminating the soil and water ways.

O: Include messages about environmental harms of tobacco in motivation to support nicotine and tobacco use cessation.

W: Add environmental related warnings and images to warning labels on nicotine and tobacco products and create educational campaigns to raise awareness about the environmental harms of tobacco.

E: Strengthen ban on tobacco advertisement, promotion, and sponsorship to include publicity of corporate social responsibility initiatives, including greenwashing, and other tobacco industry activities alleging to be focused on protecting the environment.

R: Levy corporate taxes to externalize costs of environmental harms and implement extended producer responsibility regulations on the tobacco industry to reduce, mitigate and prevent manufacturing and post-consumption tobacco product waste.

Several examples of policies are being implemented, and a careful evaluation of their impact will continue to guide next steps and best practices. These include policies that seek to ban microplastics from entering the environment. (15,16) Tobacco product waste, especially cigarette filters, is a major source of microplastics contamination of waterways and soil.

WHO and public health champions around the world marked World No Tobacco Day 2022 by focusing on the many ways in which tobacco threatens the environment we live in.

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The 2022 global campaign aims to raise public awareness about the environmental impact of the entire tobacco cycle, from its cultivation, production, and distribution to post consumption toxic waste. The campaign will also aim to expose the tobacco industry's effort to greenwash its reputation and to make its products more appealing by marketing them as environmentally friendly. The World No Tobacco Day 2022 campaign calls on governments and policymakers to step up legislation, including implementing and strengthening existing mechanisms to make producers responsible for the environmental and economic costs of dealing with tobacco-related environmental harm. Beyond the call to governments and policymakers, World No Tobacco Day 2022 established an opportunity to

create, or strengthen, partnerships between academics, advocates, youth and others in tobacco control and environmental protection, mobilizing a wider group of stakeholders in advocacy for a healthier planet. Strengthening the implementation of the WHO FCTC, including Article 18, will provide additional momentum to address the environmental harms of tobacco.

**Conflicts of interest.** None declared.

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