

The logo for 'It's Still Tobacco' features a stylized cigarette with smoke rising from it, set against a dark background. The text 'It's Still Tobacco' is written in a serif font, with 'It's' in a smaller size above 'Still', and 'Tobacco' below it.

Not embargoed

Press release:

eBay loophole leads to illegal advertisement of tonnes of shisha tobacco worth millions

October 09, 2018 - A study by the advocacy group, It's Still Tobacco¹, has revealed the advertisement of tonnes of shisha tobacco to UK consumers through eBay. The advertisement of tobacco, the use of which continues to be a leading cause of disease and death, is illegal in the UK. This policy, which applies to cigarettes, shisha, and other forms of tobacco, is in place to protect people, particularly the youth. But as more people shop and communicate online, enforcing this advertising ban is becoming more difficult as loopholes can be found by tobacco sellers. Shisha tobacco is no exception.

It's Still Tobacco, a not-for-profit voluntary group who advocate for stronger regulation of the shisha tobacco industry in the UK, have revealed the exploitation of such a loophole on eBay. From July to August of this year, eBay was checked every day for shisha sales to the UK public. 634 listings, making a total of 11,058 shisha products, total weight 3,672 kg, retail value £5.51 million, were discovered. By checking the labels and descriptions the search suggests that 89.5% of products contained tobacco, 78.9% of products were likely to have avoided taxation, and no products met with UK tobacco packaging and labelling requirements; meaning every single product was illicit. In the 173 listings that claimed their product was tobacco-free or nicotine-free, 74.0% actually contained tobacco after cross-checking with manufacturer websites.

Mr Zaid Alkateb, Chair of It's Still Tobacco, said: "This is a concerning finding. Unregulated and illegal advertising of tobacco is clearly still happening in the UK and this jeopardises tobacco control efforts that are centred on protecting public health. More action is needed to close such loopholes and stop this illegal activity. The UK government is also likely losing millions in tax revenue from such activity, revenue that could be used to fund health services."

##

Editor notes:

- It's Still Tobacco is an advocacy group whose aims are to strengthen the enforcement of shisha regulation in the UK; for more information see www.itsstilltobacco.org
- The study was published in the journal Tobacco Control on 9th October 2018, see <https://tobaccocontrol.bmj.com/content/early/2018/10/08/tobaccocontrol-2018-054659>
- Please direct any further enquiries to info@itsstilltobacco.org