

Transcript of remarks on tobacco control by S for Health at media session

Following is the transcript of remarks made by the Secretary for Health, Professor Lo Chung-mau, at a media session after attending a radio programme this morning (July 15):

Reporter: Can you provide more details about the real time adjustment that aims to ensure that the cigarette tax can be remained at 75 per cent of the price? And also, you had just mentioned that every cigarette should have a label to signify whether it is taxed, can you also elaborate further how this can be implemented and enforced?

Secretary for Health: The World Health Organization recommended a tobacco taxation rate at at least 75 per cent of the retail price. At present, the tax proportion of the retail price is only about 64 per cent. We actually increased the tobacco tax by 31 per cent earlier this year. But unfortunately, the tobacco industry also increased the price, so that would significantly reduce the impact of our increase in the tobacco tax. And that is why the tax proportion of the retail price increased only marginally from 62 per cent to 64 per cent. So in future, we would like to seek public opinion on whether we should have a scheme to ensure that if we increase the tax rate, and even at the same time, the tobacco industry increases the price, we would ensure that the proportion of the tax related to the retail price would remain the same. If so, we will have an automatic mechanism to make sure that we follow the percentage and of course the final target is to make sure that the tax would account for 75 per cent of the retail price.

On your second question about how to give a mark or laser marker on the cigarettes which have already been taxed, this has been implemented in some countries. Some would put it on the box, some would even put it on individual cigarettes. This can be done and the advantage is that we can easily identify which one has already been taxed, which ones are illicit cigarettes. So we are considering this option, and in future this will help us to identify which are illegally imported cigarettes or tobacco products and help our retailers to identify which are the legal ones and which are the illegal ones. And even our consumers, the smokers, they would know which are the legal ones and illegal ones. That would certainly help us to fight against all these illegally imported tobacco products.

(Please also refer to the Chinese portion of the transcript.)