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Smoking deaths triple over decade: tobacco report

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By [Kate Kelland](#)

LONDON (Reuters) - Tobacco-related deaths have nearly tripled in the past decade and big tobacco firms are undermining public efforts that could save millions, a report led by the health campaign group the World Lung Foundation (WLF) said on Wednesday.

In the report, marking the tenth anniversary of its first Tobacco Atlas, the WLF and the American Cancer Society said if current trends continue, a billion people will die from tobacco use and exposure this century - one person every six seconds.

Tobacco has killed 50 million people in the last 10 years, and tobacco is responsible for more than 15 percent of all male deaths and 7 percent of female deaths, the new Tobacco Atlas report found. (www.tobaccoatlas.org)

In China, tobacco is already the number one killer - causing 1.2 million deaths a year - and that number is expected to rise to 3.5 million a year by 2030, the report said.

That is part of a broader shift, with smoking rates in the developed world declining but numbers growing in poorer regions, said Michael Eriksen, one of the report's authors and director of the Institute of Public Health at Georgia State University.

"If we don't act, the projections for the future are even more morbid. And the burden of death caused by tobacco is increasingly one of the developing world, particularly Asia, the Middle East and Africa," he said in an interview.

Almost 80 percent of people who die from tobacco-related illnesses now come from low- and middle-income countries. In Turkey, 38 percent of male deaths are from smoking-related illnesses, though smoking also remains the biggest killer of American women too.

WLF's chief executive Peter Baldini accused the tobacco industry of thriving on ignorance about the true effect of smoking and "misinformation to subvert health policies that could save millions".

The report said the industry had stepped up its fight against anti-tobacco policies, launching legal challenges and seeking to delay or stop the introduction of plain packaging, legislation banning smoking in public places, advertising bans and health warnings on packets.

The world's six biggest tobacco firms made \$35.1 billion in profits in 2010 - equal to the combined earnings of Coca-Cola, Microsoft and McDonald's, the report said.

Smoking causes lung cancer as well as several other chronic pulmonary diseases and is a major risk factor in heart disease, the world's number one killer.

More than 170 countries have signed up to a World Health Organization-led convention committing them to cut smoking rates, limiting exposure to second-hand smoke, and curbing tobacco advertising and promotion.

WHO director general Margaret Chan said thanks in part to that convention, 1.1 billion people have in the past two years become covered by at least one measure designed to curb tobacco use. She added, however, that the battle was far from over and urged more countries to fight the industry.

"We must never allow the tobacco industry to get the upper hand," she said in a foreword to the report. "Tobacco is a killer. It should not be advertised, subsidized or glamorized."

(Reporting by Kate Kelland; Editing by Ben Harding)



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