



Retailers protest at ban on tobacco displays

“This display ban in my shop has taken money out of my till and put it in the pocket of the criminal”

William Hanley

By Sarah Stack PA

A BAN on displaying tobacco products in stores in the Republic is putting money from tills straight into the pockets of criminals, shopkeepers said yesterday.

Retailers Against Smuggling (RAS) said cigarettes sales have fallen dramatically in recent months with the black market fuelling job losses and costing the industry hundreds of millions of euro.

It maintained cigarette sales can be as high as 40 per cent of a retailer's annual turnover.

RAS spokesman William Hanley said the Office of Tobacco Control's (OTC) point-of-sale ban has practically wiped out the legal tobacco trade.

“Criminals are costing our industry hundreds of millions every year and we are staring down the barrel of thousands of job losses throughout the country,” Mr Hanley said.

“The display ban in my shop has taken money out my till and put it in the pocket of the criminal.

“Sales have fallen dramatically since the 1st of July.”

The point-of-sale display ban came in to force in July, with shop owners caught flouting the law facing a fine of €3,000 (£2,760) or six months in prison.

The OTC, which maintained the ban was a pioneering move to prevent underage

smoking, recently revealed 97 per cent of stores were complying with the law.

Mr Hanley, who owns a SuperValu outlet in Clondalkin, west Dublin, said retailers are socially responsible and make every effort to ensure nobody under the age of 18 is sold cigarettes.

Revenue's Customs Service recently revealed it has seized approximately 75 million cigarettes with a retail value of around €30.5 million (£28.96m) so far this year.

“I would like to know what the OTC is doing to regulate those criminals who are selling smuggled and counterfeit cigarettes on the black market,” Mr Hanley said.

“We need to work with the likes of the OTC to ensure the issue of tobacco smuggling is dealt with efficiently.”

Meanwhile, one of the world's largest cigarette makers, Philip Morris Ltd, and Donegal retailer Maurice Timony have launched a High Court challenge to overturn the display ban legislation.