

News

'Light' smokes deceiving, says B.C. class-action suit

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A class-action lawsuit aimed at stopping Canada's biggest tobacco company from using the words light and mild to describe its cigarettes was filed in B.C. Supreme Court in Vancouver yesterday.

The representative plaintiff, 46-year-old Kenneth Knight from Roberts Creek on the Sunshine Coast, smoked Imperial Tobacco light brands, usually Player's Light, for 17 years.

He claims that while he thought he was choosing a safer option, in fact it was just as dangerous and debilitating as regular cigarettes.

"What this case is about is a deceptive marketing practice," said Knight's lawyer David Klein."

In fact, Health Canada has said that it's going to ban the use of the descriptors light and mild. Although the regulations have been in the works for about two years, it hasn't actually occurred."

Klein said his client is seeking two types of relief -- an injunction to stop Imperial from using the words and compensation from sales in B.C. that could run into the hundreds of millions of dollars. He said a recent class-action suit in Illinois, which

resulted in a verdict of \$10 billion, was an impetus for the B.C. case, which applies only to smokers who buy products in B.C.

The case is supported by a Burnaby-based non-profit organization, Airspace Action on Smoking Health, which says tobacco companies have been "getting away with murder" for years with their marketing practices.

The organization's president, Heather Mackenzie, says more than 45,000 Canadians die every year from smoking and part of the problem is the deceptive use of light and mild brand names.

Yves-Thomas Dorval, director of public affairs for Montreal-based Imperial Tobacco, said his company had not been notified of the court case and could not comment on the specifics.