



## Thanks to the European Union we are saying farewell to the glamorous life of the social smoker

Grace Dent

*Yesterday's smokers had it easy. Thanks to new EU laws today's smokers are destined to amble into the boozer carrying a shag-repelling box of nicotine horror, part covered in a photo of rotting eye, or a weeping scab*

So, farewell to the crafty ten pack, gone in the EU's plans to reduce the number of smokers by 2.4 million. Ten packs were the part-time smoker's buddy: refuge of the heartbroken, the exam-sitter and the crash dieter. Chum of the non-committed chugger.

I've kept a ten pack of Marlboro Gold, on and off, over the last decade, in a kitchen drawer beside a box of Cook's matches. My heavy smoking days may have ended decades ago, but that ten pack was always there to break out in times of unique woe. The death's door dog or the shitty solicitor's letter. Times where only the hiss of a match, a sharp inhale and five minutes stood in the garden smoking furiously like a Shelagh Delaney heroine will do.

"I smoke, because I'm hoping for an early death and I need to cling to something," goes the gorgeously over dramatic Morrissey lyric.

But the European courts are onto people like me, as well as the "just buy a ten pack on Friday before the pub" squad, plus those in-denial heavy smokers who won't flinch at paying £5 for a ten pack but can't justify parting with £10 for a pack of twenty.

Ten packs were a haven for people like me, who really didn't think that they smoked, thus feeling themselves, employing logic as air-tight as Swiss cheese,

to be immune from all the carcinogenic substances. I shall miss those delicate fag packets now they're gone, but, being a fan of the sound of my own voice and less keen on the thought of growling through an electro-larynx, it's probably for the best.

Moves over the past decade to make smoking utterly unfashionable – plus a thorough pain in the arse to partake in – have certainly gained ground. The sheer bloody-mindedness required today to be a proper, dedicated, paid-up, twenty-pack carrying nicotine-huffing cigarette fiend is beginning to verge on impressive.

These new rulings, as well as banning ten packs – which no proper smoker would be seen dead with anyway, as it would suggest a namby-pamby approach to cancer-tempting – now specify that all packets must devote 65 per cent of the packaging to pictures of grotesque seeping pustules and gangrenous feet. The remainder of the packet will now, by law, be a sludgy snot colour, not dissimilar to the inch of silt at the bottom of Fungus the Bogeyman's laundry basket.

It's peculiar to think how at a point in the not remotely distant past all the glamorous, cool things would appear in the pub with a fresh, white packet of Silk Cut or a devilish crimson packet of Marlboro Reds, then smoke raffishly by the juke box, or up in each other's faces at the pub table.

It was common to arrive home with one's lovely new dress festooned in fag burns and smeared ash. Yesterday's smokers had it easy. Today's smokers are destined to amble into the boozer carrying a shag-repelling box of nicotine horror, part covered in a photo of rotting eye, or a weeping scab, the rest of the packet will be block-coloured in the shade of green a serial killer might choose to paint an underground bunker.

This treat will cost them £10 per packet minimum. They will be free to smoke these cigarettes in an ever-decreasingly roped-off area adjacent to the pub's fire exit. For a short while in 2007, around the time of the smoking ban, this area was full of the pub's most wild, shaggable vagabond souls, puffing away sexily. It was almost worth taking up smoking, buying a packet of ten and a warmer coat for the thrill of being inside the smoking area. Those days are over. The modern smoking zone is a bird-crap spattered recreational planning after-thought, filled with grey-faced hardcore cigarette users.

If you're lucky, they might show you their packet. 'I've got the rotting foot!' your new buddy might shout, thrusting a photo in your face of a soon-to-be amputated lower limb. 'Ha, ha I've got the collapsed face just-had-a-stroke picture!' you might laugh, both sharing a little gallows humour.

Or maybe like me, you'll admit defeat, stay indoors, spare your lungs and not bother. That's one down, 2.4 million more to go.

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