

Arnold I. Palacios
Governor



David M. Apatang
Lieutenant Governor

COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR

05 JUN 2025

GOV2025-437

The Honorable Edmund S. Villagomez
Speaker
House of Representatives
Twenty-Fourth Northern Marianas
Commonwealth Legislature
Saipan, MP 96950

The Honorable Dennis James C. Mendiola
President
The Senate; Twenty-Fourth Northern
Marianas Commonwealth Legislature
Saipan, MP 96950

Dear Mr. Speaker and Mr. President:

This is to inform you that I have signed into law **House Bill No. 24-20**, entitled, "To require conspicuous warning labels be placed on all betel nut products and containers that are imported or sold in the CNMI.", which was passed by the House of Representatives and the Senate of the Twenty-Fourth Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature.

This bill becomes **Public Law No. 24-02**. Copies bearing my signature are forwarded for your reference.

Sincerely,

ARNOLD I. PALACIOS
Governor

cc: Lieutenant Governor; Attorney General; Commonwealth Law Revision;
Public Auditor; Special Assistant for Administration; Department of Commerce;
Department of Public Health; Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation;
Programs and Legislative Review Office



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
TWENTY-FOURTH NORTHERN MARIANAS COMMONWEALTH
LEGISLATURE**

*Honorable Jesus P. Mafnas Memorial Building
Capitol Hill
Saipan, MP 96950
cnmileg.net*

May 13, 2025

The Honorable Arnold I. Palacios
Governor
Commonwealth of the Northern
Mariana Islands
Capitol Hill
Saipan, MP 96950

Dear Governor Palacios:

I have the honor of transmitting herewith for your action **H. B. No. 24-20**, entitled: "To require conspicuous warning labels be placed on all betel nut products and containers that are imported or sold in the CNMI.", which was passed by the House of Representatives and the Senate of the Twenty-Fourth Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature.

Sincerely yours,


Linda B. Muña, MPA
House Clerk

Attachment



**TWENTY-FOURTH NORTHERN MARIANA COMMONWEALTH LEGISLATURE
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

FIRST SPECIAL SESSION

APRIL 24, 2025

REPRESENTATIVE BLAS JONATHAN "BJ" T. ATTAO OF SAIPAN, PRECINCT 3 (*for himself*, Representatives Vincent R. Aldan, Daniel I. Aquino Jr., Roman C. Benavente, Angelo A. Camacho, Diego V. F. Camacho, Joel C. Camacho, Marissa R. Flores, Elias J.M. Rangamar, Edmund S. Villagomez, and Ralph N. Yumul) in an open and public meeting with an opportunity for the public to comment, introduced the following Bill:

H. B. No. 24-20

AN ACT

**TO REQUIRE CONSPICUOUS WARNING LABELS BE
PLACED ON ALL BETEL NUT PRODUCTS AND
CONTAINERS THAT ARE IMPORTED OR SOLD IN THE
CNMI.**

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

The Bill was not referred to a House Committee.

**THE BILL WAS PASSED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES ON
FIRST AND FINAL READING, APRIL 24, 2025;
without amendments and transmitted to THE SENATE.**

IN THE SENATE

The Bill was not referred to a Senate Committee.

**THE BILL WAS PASSED BY THE SENATE ON FIRST AND FINAL READING, MAY 9, 2025;
without amendments and returned to THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES.**

**H. B. NO. 24-20 IS DULY PASSED BY THE TWENTY-FOURTH NORTHERN MARIANAS COMMONWEALTH
LEGISLATURE.**


Linda B. Muña, House Clerk



TWENTY-FOURTH NORTHERN MARIANAS COMMONWEALTH LEGISLATURE
IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

FIRST DAY, FIRST SPECIAL SESSION

APRIL 24, 2025

H. B. No. 24-20

AN ACT

**TO REQUIRE CONSPICUOUS WARNING LABELS BE PLACED ON
ALL BETEL NUT PRODUCTS AND CONTAINERS THAT ARE
IMPORTED OR SOLD IN THE CNMI.**

**BE IT ENACTED BY THE TWENTY-FOURTH NORTHERN
MARIANAS COMMONWEALTH LEGISLATURE:**

1 **SECTION 1. FINDINGS AND PURPOSES.**

2 Federal law establishes labeling requirements on certain consumer products
3 that are carcinogenic or hazardous to one's health. For example, the Family
4 Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act gives the Food and Drug
5 Administration (FDA) the power to regulate the tobacco industry, particularly in
6 regards to the manufacture, marketing, and distribution of tobacco products.
7 Indeed, in March 2020, FDA finalized the "Required Warnings for Cigarette
8 Packages and Advertisements" rule, establishing eleven new cigarette health
9 warnings—each featuring a textual warning accompanied by a photorealistic
10 image illustrating the dangers of smoking.

11 Additionally, the Federal Cigarette Labeling and Advertising Act and
12 related regulations impose strict requirements on the manufacture, marketing,

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1 and distribution of tobacco products, ensuring that consumers are fully informed
2 of the associated health risks. These regulations require that cigarette packaging
3 prominently display color graphics and warning statements illustrating the
4 dangers of smoking. Warnings such as “WARNING: Tobacco smoke can harm
5 your children” and “WARNING: Smoking causes fatal lung disease in
6 nonsmokers” must occupy the top 50% of the front and rear panels of all cigarette
7 packages. The law also mandates that these warnings be conspicuously placed,
8 clearly visible beneath any clear wrapping, and accurately reproduced as
9 approved by the FDA.

10 The Legislature finds that areca nut (commonly known as betel nut)
11 contains a confirmed carcinogen, and its sale, packaging, and distribution should
12 be subject to similar labeling and warning requirements as other carcinogenic
13 consumer products, like tobacco. Yet, despite betel nut containing a known
14 carcinogen, betel nut products sold in the CNMI currently lack any warning
15 labels, leaving consumers uninformed about the serious health risks associated
16 with its use.

17 This Act establishes mandatory labeling requirements for all betel nut
18 products sold, distributed, or imported in the CNMI. It prohibits the sale of any
19 betel nut product that does not display clear health warnings about the risks of
20 arecoline, a known carcinogen. It requires that warning labels be directly placed
21 on each betel nut package and retail container in a prominent, highly visible
22 manner. To prevent desensitization and reinforce awareness of health risks, two
23 distinct warning labels must be used on a rotating basis—one label during the
24 first half of the year and the other during the second half. This semi-annual
25 rotation ensures that consumers are consistently presented with differing
26 warning designs. Additionally, this Act ties the issuance and renewal of the betel
27 nut license established under 4 CMC § 51904 to businesses’ compliance with
28 these requirements. Last, it authorizes the CNMI Department of Commerce to
29 regulate betel nut labeling and enforce the requirements established herein.

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1 The Legislature recognizes that the implementation of labeling
2 requirements may impose additional costs on retailers and importers. In response
3 to these concerns, nonprofit organizations, such as the Commonwealth Cancer
4 Association, have expressed support for this Act and have offered to print and
5 provide the required labels to the Department of Commerce for distribution to
6 licensees at no cost. The Commonwealth Cancer Association has further indicated
7 that it would enter into a two-year agreement to supply these labels free of
8 charge, acknowledging the financial burden that sticker production and
9 placement may place on businesses. Their commitment ensures that compliance
10 with this Act will not create an undue economic hardship on retailers and
11 importers while still advancing public health objectives.

12 To track the effectiveness of the labeling requirements and to support any
13 nonprofit organizations involved in this public health initiative, this Act requires
14 retailers to track the number of betel nut products sold on a monthly basis.
15 Retailers must maintain records of each betel nut product transaction and submit
16 these records to the Department of Commerce by the 5th business day of each
17 month. The Department will then use this data to identify gaps in label
18 compliance and assess whether the labels have had their intended impact on
19 consumer behavior. The reported information will also assist nonprofit
20 organizations in determining how many labels should be created and donated to
21 the Department. Last, this Act authorizes the Department of Commerce to share
22 this information with the CNMI Department of Public Health and the
23 Commonwealth Healthcare Corporation to help inform their public health
24 policies and initiatives. All data submitted by retailers will be treated as
25 confidential and used solely for the purposes outlined within this Act.

26 By implementing these labeling requirements, this Act ensures that
27 consumers in the CNMI are fully informed about the significant health risks
28 associated with betel nut use. Just as federal regulations mandate clear and
29 conspicuous warnings for tobacco products, this Act establishes similar

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1 protections for betel nut consumers, reinforcing public awareness and promoting
2 informed decision-making. Through labeling standards, regulatory oversight, and
3 enforcement mechanisms, this legislation aims to reduce public health risks and
4 provide betel nut users with the same level of consumer protection that is
5 extended to other similar carcinogenic products.

6 **SECTION 2. AMENDMENT.**

7 Section 51902 of Chapter 19, Division 5, Title 4 of the Commonwealth Code
8 is hereby amended to read as follows:

9 **“§ 51902. Definitions.**

10 For the purposes of this chapter:

11 (a) “Areca nut” is the seed of the areca palm that is commonly referred
12 to as betel nut.

13 (b) “Betel nut product” refers to any packaged item intended for
14 individual retail sale that contains, consists of, or is derived from the areca
15 nut (areca catechu), whether in whole, processed, prepared, or mixed form,
16 and is intended for human consumption or chewing. This includes, but is not
17 limited to, betel nut sold in small plastic baggies or similar packaging
18 commonly found in retail establishments. All such betel nut products must
19 prominently display the applicable warning labels described in 4 CMC §§
20 51915(b)(3)(i)–(ii).

21 (c) “Betel nut container” refers to any box, carton, plastic basket, or
22 similar packaging used to hold multiple individual betel nut products for
23 retail display or storage. These containers are commonly used to transport

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1 or store multiple bagged betel nut products and may be made of polystyrene
2 foam (Styrofoam), cardboard, plastic, or other materials. All such containers
3 must prominently display the applicable warning labels described in 4 CMC
4 §§ 51915(b)(3)(iii)–(iv).”

5 **SECTION 3. AMENDMENT.**

6 Section 51915 of Chapter 19, Division 5, Title 4 of the Commonwealth Code
7 is hereby amended to read as follows:

8 **“§ 51915. Conditions of Premises: Areca Nut (Betel Nut) Display;**
9 **Labeling.**

10 (a) Display and Access Requirements.

11 A person or business entity shall ensure that any areca nut (betel nut)
12 are displayed in accordance with this section. Areca nut (betel nut) shall not
13 be displayed openly or in any manner in any part of the business premises
14 generally open to the public. Such packages or bags of areca nut (betel nut)
15 shall be secured underneath or behind the cashier counter at the point of
16 sale, which can only be accessed by the owner or an authorized agent
17 (cashier) of the retail establishment upon the request from a person of legal
18 age to purchase such item or product.

19 (b) Labeling Requirements.

20 (1) General.

21 (i) It shall be unlawful for any person to manufacture, package,
22 sell, offer to sell, distribute, or import for sale or distribution within the

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1 CNMI any betel nut product unless the packaging meets the labeling
2 requirements of this Section.

3 (2) Label Placement.

4 (i) Each label shall be prominently displayed directly on every
5 betel nut product and betel nut container.

6 (ii) Labels shall be placed in a manner that ensures they clearly
7 contrast with other printed material on the item.

8 (iii) Betel nut products must comply with the applicable warning
9 label requirements described in subsections (3)(i)–(ii) below.

10 (iv) Betel nut containers must comply with the applicable warning
11 label requirements described in subsections (3)(iii)–(iv) below.

12 (3) Label Design; Rotating Labels.

13 (i) From January 1 through June 30, all betel nut products must
14 display labels that meet the following requirements:

15 (A) The design is a circular shape with a diameter of at least
16 1.5 inches, featuring a black background with a dark red octagonal
17 outline resembling a stop sign behind the text with not more than
18 30% opacity and not less than 15% opacity.

19 (B) The design shall include a red triangle with a black
20 exclamation mark to signify caution. The following text shall be
21 centered within the circle, superimposed over the octagonal shape:

22 “WARNING: BETEL NUT CONTAINS ARECOLINE, KNOWN TO

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1 CAUSE: CANCER.” The font used shall be Times New Roman with
2 a font size of no less than 24.

3 (C) Below the text described in the above subsection (b)(3)(i)(B),
4 there shall be text stating the following: “*MAY COMPLICATE
5 PREGNANCY.” The font used shall be Times New Roman, italicized,
6 with a font size of no less than 9.4.

7 (D) A black circular “18+” symbol shall be placed at the bottom
8 of the design.

9 (E) All text shall appear in white against a black, dark red, or
10 dark gray background.

11 (ii) From July 1 through December 31, all betel nut products must
12 display labels that meet the following requirements:

13 (A) The design is a circular shape with a diameter of 1.5 inches,
14 featuring a white background with red text stating “WARNING”
15 written twice in large, red, curved text—one instance at the top and
16 another at the bottom. The curved text shall use the Times New
17 Roman font in red with a font size of no less than 43.6.

18 (B) The design shall include a red triangle with a black
19 exclamation mark to signify caution, along with the following text:
20 “BETEL NUT CONTAINS ARECOLINE, KNOWN TO CAUSE
21 CANCER.” The font used shall be Times New Roman with a font size
22 of no less than 14. The text shall be black.

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1 (C) Below the text described in the above subsection
2 (b)(3)(ii)(B), there shall be text stating the following: "DO NOT
3 CHEW BETEL NUT IF YOU ARE PREGNANT." The font used shall
4 be Times New Roman, italicized, with a font size of no less than 11.
5 The text shall be black.

6 (D) A black circular "18+" symbol shall be placed at the bottom
7 of the design.

8 (iii) All betel nut containers with a surface area of less than
9 50 square inches must display a label that meets the following
10 requirements:

11 (A) The design is a rectangular shape measuring 5.5" x 8.5".

12 (B) The design features the word "WARNING" in bold,
13 uppercase black text using the Times New Roman font at a size of at
14 least 70, centered near the top of the label. A red triangle containing
15 a black exclamation mark is positioned directly above the word
16 "WARNING."

17 (C) Below the "WARNING" text, the label includes a red
18 diamond symbol containing a white skull and crossbones graphic
19 and a black circular "18+" symbol.

20 (D) Below these symbols, the following text is displayed in
21 centered black Times New Roman font with a font size of no less

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1 than 29.5: "BETEL NUT CONTAINS ARECOLINE, KNOWN TO
2 CAUSE: CANCER."

3 (iv) All betel nut containers with a surface area of 50 square
4 inches or more must display a label that meets the following
5 requirements:

6 (A) The design is a rectangular shape measuring 8.5" x 11".

7 (B) The design features the word "WARNING" in bold,
8 uppercase black text using the Times New Roman font at a size of at
9 least 100, centered near the top of the label. A red triangle
10 containing a black exclamation mark is positioned directly above the
11 word "WARNING."

12 (C) Below the "WARNING" text, the label includes a red
13 diamond symbol containing a white skull and crossbones graphic
14 and a black circular "18+" symbol.

15 (D) Below these symbols, the following text is displayed in
16 centered black Times New Roman font with a font size of not less
17 than 45.1: "BETEL NUT CONTAINS ARECOLINE, KNOWN TO
18 CAUSE: CANCER."

19 (v) Notwithstanding the above label design requirements, the
20 Department of Commerce may, through regulation, develop and
21 implement alternative label designs of appropriate size and character
22 to enhance consumer visibility and comprehension. Any adjustments

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1 to font, type size, text, color, format, or any other design element shall
2 ensure that the text remains clear, conspicuous, and legible. The design
3 must include:

4 (A) A black circular "18+" symbol.

5 (B) A red triangle with a black exclamation mark to signify
6 caution.

7 (C) A clear notice of the health risks associated with using betel
8 nut, including the increased risk of cancer and complications during
9 pregnancy.

10 (D) A prominent display of the word "WARNING."

11 (E) For betel nut products, the design must be circular with a
12 diameter of no less than 1.5 inches.

13 (F) For betel nut containers with a surface area of less than 50
14 square inches, the design must be rectangular with dimensions no
15 smaller than 5.5" x 8.5".

16 (G) For betel nut containers with a surface area of 50 square
17 inches or more, the design must be rectangular with dimensions no
18 smaller than 8.5" x 11".

19 (c) Enforcement and Licensing.

20 (1) Compliance with all display and labeling requirements of this
21 Section is mandatory for the issuance and continued validity of a license
22 to import or sell betel nut.

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1 (2) Any violation of these requirements may result in suspension,
2 revocation, or denial of the license established under this Chapter.”

3 **SECTION 4. AMENDMENT.**

4 Section 51920 of Chapter 19, Division 5, Title 4 of the Commonwealth Code
5 is hereby amended to read as follows:

6 **“§ 51920. Adoption of Regulation.**

7 The Department of Commerce shall have the authority to promulgate
8 rules and regulations to implement and enforce this Chapter. These
9 regulations may include, but are not limited to, reasonable application filing
10 fees; specifications for required warning labels; procedures for compliance
11 and enforcement; adjustments to label size, format, and design elements as
12 long as they remain clear, conspicuous, and in compliance with 4 CMC §
13 51915(b)(3)(v); and any additional measures necessary to ensure the
14 effective administration of this Chapter.”

15 **SECTION 5. REPEAL AND RE-ENACTMENT.**

16 Section 51921 of Chapter 19, Division 5, Title 4 of the Commonwealth Code
17 is hereby repealed and re-enacted to read as follows:

18 **“§ 51921. Public-Private Cooperation; Nonprofit Assistance.**

19 (a) The Department of Commerce is authorized to enter into
20 agreements with nonprofit organizations for the purpose of receiving
21 financial assistance or in-kind contributions, including the provision of

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1 required warning labels, to support the implementation and enforcement of
2 this Chapter.

3 (b) Any agreement regarding the provision of labels that is entered into
4 pursuant to this Section shall ensure that:

5 (1) The labels provided meet the requirements set forth in 4 CMC
6 § 51915(b)(3);

7 (2) The distribution of labels is conducted in a manner that supports
8 compliance among affected businesses; and

9 (3) The assistance received does not create any financial obligation
10 for the Commonwealth.”

11 **SECTION 6. ENACTMENT.**

12 Section 51922 of Chapter 19, Division 5, Title 4 of the Commonwealth Code
13 is hereby enacted to read as follows:

14 **“§ 51922. Retailer Reporting and Tracking Requirements.**

15 (a) Retailers of betel nut products are required to both track the
16 number of betel nut products sold on a monthly basis and provide that
17 information to the Department of Commerce in the form of monthly sales
18 reports. These reports must include, at a minimum, the total number of betel
19 nut products sold during the reporting period, as well as a general
20 description of the types of betel nut products sold, including an estimate of
21 the number of betel nuts per product. If the retailer sells multiple sizes of
22 betel nut products, they must provide an estimate of the average number of

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1 betel nuts in each product type (e.g., small baggie, large baggie) and report
2 how many of each type of package was sold. The reports must be submitted
3 no later than the 5th business day of each month for the previous month's
4 sales.

5 (b) The Department of Commerce shall utilize the sales data to assess
6 the effectiveness of the warning labels in influencing consumer behavior, to
7 evaluate trends in betel nut product sales, and to provide information to
8 nonprofits in regard to the number of labels needed for distribution. The
9 data collected pursuant to this Section may be shared with the CNMI
10 Department of Public Health and the Commonwealth Healthcare
11 Corporation in order to assist in the development and implementation of
12 public health policies and initiatives.

13 (c) All sales data provided to the Department of Commerce shall be
14 treated as confidential and used solely for the purposes outlined in this
15 Section. The Department of Commerce shall implement necessary measures
16 to ensure the security and privacy of data.

17 (d) Compliance with all reporting and tracking requirements of this
18 Section is mandatory for the issuance and continued validity of a license to
19 import or sell betel nut. Any violation of these requirements may result in
20 suspension, revocation, or denial of the license established under this
21 Chapter."

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SECTION 7. EXAMPLE LABELS.

All betel nut product and container labels required under this Act shall substantially conform to the example designs below. These examples are not to scale and do not depict the exact font size or design dimensions. Instead, these examples illustrate the intended design elements, such as a black background with a dark red octagonal outline resembling a stop sign, in accordance with the requirements established within this Act.

Example of label meeting 4 CMC § 51915(b)(3)(i) requirements:



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1 Example of label meeting 4 CMC § 51915(b)(3)(ii) requirements:



2 Example of label meeting 4 CMC §§ 51915(b)(3)(iii)–(iv) requirements:



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SECTION 8. SEVERABILITY.

If any provisions of this Act or the application of any such provision to any person or circumstance should be held invalid by a court of competent jurisdiction, the remainder of this Act or the application of its provisions to persons or circumstances other than those to which it is held invalid shall not be affected thereby.

SECTION 9. SAVINGS CLAUSE.

This Act and any repealer contained herein shall not be construed as affecting any existing right acquired under contract or acquired under statutes repealed or under any rule, regulation, or order adopted under the statutes. Repealers contained in this Act shall not affect any proceeding instituted under or pursuant to prior law. The enactment of the Act shall not have the effect of terminating, or in any way modifying, any liability, civil or criminal, which shall already be in existence on the date this Act becomes effective.

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SECTION 10. EFFECTIVE DATE.

This Act shall take effect upon its approval by the Governor or it becoming law without such approval. However, labeling requirements established under this Act, including 4 CMC §§ 51915(b)–(c), as amended, shall not be enforced until October 1, 2025, to provide affected businesses with a reasonable period for compliance.


Attested to by:


Linda B. Muña, House Clerk

Certified by:


SPEAKER EDMUND S. VILLAGOMEZ
House of Representatives
24th Northern Marianas Commonwealth Legislature

Approved this 5th day of June, 2025


ARNOLD I. PALACIOS
Governor
Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands