



Smuggling concerns over higher cigarette prices

RONAN MCGREEVY

RETAILERS HAVE called for an end to hikes in the price of cigarettes claiming that it only benefits smugglers.

The Government has increased the excise on cigarettes by more than €1 in the last three budgets, although it has resisted calls from anti-tobacco campaigners to put €2 on a packet of cigarettes in a single budget.

A new organisation called Retailers Against Smuggling (RAS), which includes individual retailers and major chains such as SuperValu and Topaz garages,

claims contraband cigarettes cost them nearly a half a billion euros in lost sales last year and the State is losing nearly two-thirds of that in revenue.

RAS, which is supported by the Convenience Stores & Newsagents Association (CSNA), says cigarette sales are down 30 per cent, but there is no corresponding fall in the number of smokers.

Benny Gilsonan, a national spokesman for Retailers Against Smuggling, described the situation for retailers as "brutal", saying that 30 per cent of traditional newsagent revenues come from cigarette sales.