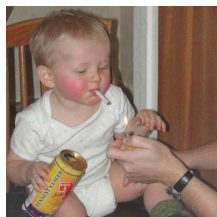


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By: Stefan Anitei, Science Editor



ObservationDeck

[New Machine Can Tell Your Age](#)

Bad news for Japanese teen smokers

Teenage years are the "best" when it comes to becoming hooked on tobacco. Add to that the fact that adolescents can hardly tell the difference between what is right and what is wrong and you will see why puffing on a cigarette makes many young girls and boys feel hotter and cooler. However, the Japanese have come up with their own solution to this problem: the 570,000 cigarette vending machines in Japan may soon be able to assess the age of the buyer, based on the count of the wrinkles, crow's feet and skin sags, and thus determining if the client is old enough to be allowed to smoke (in Japan, the legal age for smoking is 20). This new technology, developed by the Fujitaka Co. based on the study of facial traits, may begin to be used starting with July. As the customer will look into a digital camera connected to the machine, the system will analyze everything, focusing on facial details, like wrinkles around the eyes, bone structure and skin sags. The system was developed after a research that was made on the images of over 100,000 people. "With face recognition, so long as you've got some change and you are an adult, you can buy cigarettes like before. The problem of minors borrowing (identification) cards to purchase cigarettes could be avoided as well," said Hajime Yamamoto, a company spokesman. Japan already uses an age-identifying smart card named 'taspo' and a system reading the age from drivers' licenses. The facial identification system is still plagued by doubts about its accuracy. "The system could correctly identify about 90% of the users, with the remaining 10% sent to a 'gray zone' for minors that look older, and baby-faced adults, where they would be asked to insert their driving license," said Yamamoto. Underage smoking experienced a decrease in Japan; still, a 2004 survey revealed that 13% of boys and 4% of girls aged 17 - 18 smoked daily. I wonder if the company that has developed this system ever took into consideration the results of many researchers that proved that smoking actually make one look older because it speeds skin aging.