Companies want to sell 'light'

Cigarette-makers ask judge if they can market such products overseas

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A group of tobacco companies, including two from North Carolina, asked a federal judge yesterday to let them continue marketing "low tar" and "light" cigarettes overseas, two weeks after she banned the practice in the United States.

U.S. District Judge Gladys Kessler ruled Aug. 17 that the nation's top cigarette-makers violated racketeering laws and deceived the public for years about the health hazards of smoking.

Kessler ordered the companies to stop using terms such as "light" on their products, saying that such cigarettes are no safer than others. She also ordered the companies to publish in newspapers and on their Web sites "corrective statements" on the adverse health effects and addictiveness of smoking and nicotine.

In court documents filed yesterday, tobacco attorneys asked Kessler to clarify that ruling to let them continue their marketing practices and selling so-called "light" and "low-tar" cigarettes overseas.

"Banning the use of the low tar descriptors in foreign countries would be an unwarranted intrusion upon the right of these countries to regulate cigarette sales within their own borders," attorneys wrote.

Prohibiting such marketing would put U.S. cigarette companies at an unfair disadvantage in the international market, attorneys said. Overseas markets represent a growth area for tobacco sales, tobacco executives have said.

The companies also asked Kessler not to force them to post statements in international stores that smoking is addictive and causes health problems. She ordered the companies to make such statements in the United States.

The request was filed by R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co. and Brown & Williamson Tobacco Corp., both owned by Reynolds American Inc. of Winston-Salem, Lorillard Tobacco Co. of Greensboro, British American Tobacco Ltd. and Philip Morris USA Inc. and its parent, Altria Group Inc.