The images are required by the 2009 Tobacco Control Act, according to FDA spokesperson Jeffrey Ventura, who added that these are the first changes to cigarette pack warnings in 25 years. By Oct. 22, 2012, cigarette manufacturers will no longer be able to distribute cigarettes for sale in the United States unless they display these warnings.

The law required new warnings to cover the top half of the front and back of cigarette packs and 20% of cigarette advertisements, and they must contain color or graphics depicting the negative health consequences of smoking.

“This is something Congress wanted to happen and mandated that the FDA carry out,” Mr. Ventura said in an interview. Based on a study of 18,000 smokers conducted for the FDA by RTI International, Federal officials firmly believe that visually communicating smoking’s harm will deter cigarette consumption over the long run.

The images include tobacco-diseased lungs beside healthy lungs, a corpse in a casket, a man exhalting smoke through a tracheostomy, and lip cancer. There are also several cartoons and photos of mothers blowing smoke into infants’ faces. One positive image shows a barren tree with “I Quit.”

Blunt statements accompany each image, intended to drive home the messages that cigarette smoke not only directly harms the smoker, but the smokers’ children and people in close proximity.

“The introduction of these warnings is expected to have a significant public health impact by decreasing the number of smokers, resulting in lives saved, increased life expectancy, and improved health status,” FDA officials said in a statement.

“Eliciting strong emotional and cognitive reactions to the graphic cigarette warning label enhances recall and processing of the health warning, which helps ensure that the warning is better processed, understood, and remembered,” the study said. ‘As attitudes and beliefs change, they eventually lead to changes in intentions to quit or start smoking and then later to lowering smoking initiation and successful cessation. The time scale on which this behavior change process occurs is largely unknown in the context of the impact of exposure to graphic warning labels on smoking behaviors, but the effects on behavior change are unlikely to be immediate or short-term.”

Nevertheless, groups promoting anti-tobacco messages — including the American Heart Association — strongly believe that these changes will enhance consumer education and change behavior.

“Undoubtedly, the new graphic health warnings will heighten awareness about the dangers of smoking and, more importantly, encourage smokers to quit and decrease smoking,” an AHA press statement read. “We’re confident that the new labels will move us closer to our goal of making the nation 100% smoke free.”