



## **P R E S S R E L E A S E**

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### **Tobacco Sales to Minors Still a Concern in Santa Barbara County**

Recent undercover operations document an ongoing problem with retailers selling tobacco to youth locally. Of the 401 retailers surveyed in Santa Barbara County this year, 16% (48/301) sold cigarettes to an underage decoy down from 17% last year, yet more than double the statewide average of 5.6%.

The Santa Barbara County Public Health Department (PHD) worked with law enforcement and youth-serving agencies to conduct its annual assessment of tobacco sales to youth under 18. As in past surveys, a wide variation in sales rates was seen throughout the county. Between 2012 and 2013, illegal sales rates decreased in cities throughout the county with the exception of Santa Barbara, Lompoc and Santa Maria, where they increased, as shown in the table below. Sales to minors were most improved in Carpinteria (from 26% to 0%), Goleta (from 39% to 25%) along with Solvang and Guadalupe (from 29% to 0%). Rates in the unincorporated area dropped slightly to 9% (5/56), compared to 10% (6/63) selling last year. Though this decrease is small, it marks only the second time since 1994 that county areas recorded a rate below 10%.

#### **2013 Rates of Illegal Sale of Tobacco to Minors**

Community	Sales Rate 2012	Sales Rate 2013
Carpinteria	26%	0%
Guadalupe	29%	0%
Solvang	29%	0%
Buellton	17%	8%
Unincorporated Areas	10%	9%
Lompoc	3%	10%
Santa Barbara	9%	24%
Goleta	39%	25%
Santa Maria	3%	25%

The undercover buy operations utilize youth that are 15-17 years of age, who look under 18, carry valid state identification and do not misrepresent their age in any way. Plain-clothed law enforcement agents were involved in 59% of the buys in which the clerks were cited for violating state law. PHD strives to maintain consistency when conducting these operations. One method of doing this is to limit the number of the youth that serve as decoys in each region, thus increasing the comparability of results among neighboring communities. Nearly 75% of all known tobacco retailers in the county were shopped during the undercover buys this year. PHD maintains at least five years of data on each community. Viewing multi-year trends within a city, or at least within similar communities, helps assess youth access to tobacco products over time.

In 2010, the Santa Barbara County Board of Supervisors strengthened the penalties associated with selling tobacco to minors in the unincorporated areas. This summer, the Carpinteria City Council adopted an ordinance that requires tobacco retailers to obtain tobacco retail licenses. This ordinance replicates the county's and included zoning requirements and a ban on new significant tobacco retail shops. These laws are designed to help reduce youth access to tobacco products and promote responsible retailing.

For more information about youth access to tobacco products tobacco retail licensing, and rates of illegal sales of tobacco to minors in Santa Barbara County, please contact Ms. Dunn, at 681-5407 or [Dawn.Dunn@sbcphd.org](mailto:Dawn.Dunn@sbcphd.org).

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