Vermont Youth Exposed to Tobacco Products & Marketing in their Communities

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Statewide assessment evaluates tobacco retail environment and calls on communities to protect youth

BURLINGTON – According to a new statewide assessment, tobacco marketing remains prevalent and visible to Vermont youth. One in four stores selling tobacco products place the advertisements at eye-level for a child.

Youth and adult volunteers conducted the assessment of 767 of the approximately 1,000 tobacco retail stores in communities statewide during October through December 2014 as part of the CounterBalance campaign to help end tobacco’s influence on Vermont’s youth.

Although other types of tobacco marketing have been restricted, convenience stores and other retail outlets are still places where children and youth are certain to see tobacco products and ads. In many cases, they are exposed to tobacco marketing without even going inside the store.

According to the assessment findings, more than one in three retailers (41%) had tobacco marketing visible from outside the store, and 12 percent of these stores were within 1,000 feet of a school.

“National research shows that one out of three kids who have tried smoking were directly influenced by tobacco advertising,” said Cathy Hazlett, Health Connections of the Upper Valley, one of the community coalitions that took part in the store audits. “We know the more often kids are exposed to tobacco advertising, the more likely they are to start smoking. Unfortunately, our community store assessments found that our youth are being targeted in areas where they should be protected, such as near schools.”

Key findings from statewide assessment:

- Statewide, 12% of tobacco retailers are located within 1,000 feet of a school or park. In some places, this number is nearly 50%.
- Among stores that sell tobacco, 70% of discount stores, 50% of convenience stores, and 28% of grocery stores had exterior tobacco advertising.
- Among stores that sell tobacco, 40% of discount stores, 35% of pharmacies, 29% of convenience stores, and 16% of supermarkets placed tobacco ads at eye-level for a child – 3 feet from the floor.
- 65% of tobacco retailers sold single cigarillos. Of those that sold cigarillos, 72% offered flavored cigarillos.
- 39% of retailers advertised cigarillos for less than $1, while the average price of a pack of cigarettes in Vermont is $8.12.
- 7% of tobacco retailer stores were pharmacies, and 35% of pharmacies have tobacco ads within eye-level for a child (3 feet from the floor).

The full report is available at the Health Department’s website – Point of Sale Data & Reports

Storeowners are taking action to end tobacco’s influence on Vermont’s youth. Emily and Todd, co-owners of Jay Country Store, do not have any tobacco products or advertising visible in their store. “We decided to eliminate tobacco advertising and keep the products under the counter because of the way tobacco is
hurting our community in terms of both health and wealth. We have a lot of young shoppers come to our store, or walk by our store on their way to school, and we don't want them to be exposed to tobacco marketing.”

In Ferrisburgh, Brad Hartley, owner of Vermont Energy Company, consistently rejects promotional contracts from the tobacco industry. “Don’t underestimate the intelligence of your customers,” Brad encourages fellow storeowners. “Don’t be manipulated by industry, have courage and personal integrity, and realize you can make a difference in some young person’s life.”

State Senator Dick Mazza, owner of Dick Mazza’s General Store in Colchester, says: “I’ve been at it for 61 years. My dad had a policy to never advertise or discount cigarettes – he never touched tobacco his whole life. I’ve kept that tradition all these years. I always discourage people from buying the products. I will not advertise it or discount it.”

Watch Vermont retailers talk about the issue.

About Counter Balance
Launched in October 2015, Counter Balance is a statewide campaign focused on a variety of ways to help end tobacco’s influence on youth. Counter Balance provides facts, tips, and downloadable information to share, as well as opportunities to help prevent youth tobacco use. The Counter Balance campaign is funded by the Vermont Department of Health.

Learn more and vote – Vermont residents can learn more about what they can do in their own communities and vote for the issue most important to their town at: CounterBalanceVT.com

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