



Media Release

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Sale of Cigarettes to Minors: Encouraging results - but one sale too many!

A Dunedin retailer is facing possible prosecution and a fine of up to \$2000 after allegedly breaking the law by selling cigarettes to people younger than 18.

Public Health South staff visited eight tobacco retailers in Dunedin and Mosgiel in June during a campaign to stop retailers selling tobacco products to under-age people.

The campaign targeted retailers that complaints had been received about, that were near schools or were in areas where there is a high smoking prevalence.

Staff at seven premises refused to sell cigarettes to the 15 year-old volunteer, who had been advised to give their correct age when asked. Public Health South will contact those retailers to let them know their staff obeyed the law.

However, staff at one outlet allegedly sold cigarettes to the volunteer and a report on this case will now be sent to the Ministry of Health in Wellington. The owner of the outlet could face a warning or a district court prosecution under the Smoke-free Environments Act 1990.

Southern DHB Group Manager Pip Stewart (Women's and Children's and Public Health) said Public Health South staff are extremely encouraged that the majority of the premises asked for ID and refused to sell cigarettes to the under-age volunteers.

"Public Health South will continue with education campaigns for retailers and these will be followed up with similar operations in the future," she said.

"Business owners and staff members need to make sure they are fully aware of their obligations under the Act."

Any members of the public who have concerns about tobacco retailers selling to people younger than 18 are invited to contact Public Health South on 03 476 9800 so the matter can be investigated. For information on quitting, contact the Quitline on 0800 778 778 or at www.quit.org.nz.

ENDS

Additional Information

1. Young people in New Zealand are still becoming addicted to nicotine at an age when many do not realise the full consequences of smoking. On average, most New Zealanders aged 15-19 years who smoke started at 14.6 years of age and almost 72% would not smoke if they had their lives over again. Almost three-quarters of young people in this age group buy their cigarettes themselves.
2. By the time these young smokers reach an age where they could be expected to have a greater understanding of the effects of smoking, many have difficulty stopping. By age 18, two thirds of smokers regret starting and half have tried to quit. Recent studies indicate young smokers are especially vulnerable to the effects of nicotine and addiction to nicotine may be greater if smoking begins during adolescence.
3. The Smoke-free Environments Act 1990 (Act) prohibits the sale or supply of tobacco products to people younger than 18. The Act is a way of making tobacco less available to an age group particularly vulnerable to starting to smoke.
4. Public Health South routinely conducts Controlled Purchase Operations to monitor that retail outlets are not breaking the law. Until 2004, retailers who sold tobacco products to under-age people could be fined up to \$2000. An amendment to the Act in 2004 means retailers who have at least two convictions for selling tobacco products to a person under 18, within a two year period, may also be banned from selling tobacco products for up to three months.