

FDA awards CO contract to reduce tobacco sales to minors

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment recently secured a nearly \$1 million contract from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to assist with compliance and enforcement of new federal regulations governing illegal tobacco sales and marketing to minors.

Tobacco use remains the leading preventable cause of death and disease in the United States, killing more than 400,000 Americans and costing nearly \$100 billion in health care each year. Research shows more than 80 percent of smokers become addicted to cigarettes before they can legally purchase them and continue their tobacco addiction into adulthood, which can lead to deadly long-term health problems such as heart disease, stroke and cancer.

Tobacco sales are illegal to anyone under age 18 in Colorado. State law requires clerks to check a government-issued identification when the purchaser appears younger than 30 years old. Despite these laws, a recent department survey shows that more than 60 percent of high school smokers who tried to buy cigarettes from retail clerks were successful and nearly half of them were not asked for identification.

The FDA, which recently gained authority to regulate tobacco products, implemented new requirements that restrict retail tobacco sales and marketing. Colorado is among the first 11 states to receive FDA contracts to assist with the enforcement of these new regulations.

“Progress on reducing youth smoking is stalling, and illegal tobacco sales to Colorado children are climbing,” said Karen DeLeeuw, director of the Center for Healthy Living and Chronic Disease Prevention at the department.

“With this new FDA contract, Colorado now can provide the necessary resources to help enforce these new laws and protect our children from becoming addicted to tobacco products.”

The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment will identify illegal tobacco sales throughout the state, but focus its efforts in areas where more known illegal sales are taking place, including Denver, Southeast Colorado and several mountain and Western Slope communities.

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The department will fund local health agencies that cover six state regions to inspect approximately 1,000 retail tobacco stores.

Staff members from these local health agencies will be commissioned by the FDA to document illegal tobacco sales and advertising violations. Violations uncovered during these inspections will be forwarded to the FDA, which will issue citations to retailers.

Commissioned inspectors also will visit stores in their areas to look for self-service tobacco displays, candy-flavored cigarettes or smokeless tobacco, and tobacco products labeled as “light,” “low-tar” or “mild,” all of which now are illegal under FDA regulations.

Consumers and retailers can find more information on FDA tobacco regulations at www.fda.gov/TobaccoProducts/ProtectingKidsfromTobacco.