

Del Norte County

Fewer stores sell cigarettes to minors, officials report

Written by [Kurt Madar, The Triplicate](#) February 26, 2009 09:07 am

The number of cigarettes sold to minors in Del Norte County is apparently going down, according to the Department of Health and Human Services.

Health officials and two underage youths recruited from Del Norte High School spent Jan. 31 going store to store in an operation the department described as a “survey” rather than a “sting.”

If this had been a sting, the first violation could cost a business \$600, with a maximum penalty for up to five violations being \$6,000.

Instead, businesses that sold cigarettes to one of the underage youths were sent a warning letter putting them on notice to expect follow-up visits when health officials will be accompanied by law enforcement personnel.

“Twenty-five stores county and citywide were surveyed with four stores illegally selling cigarettes,” the Health Department said in a press release. “This equates to a 16 percent sales rate, which is a significant reduction of a similar survey conducted in 2006 where the sales rate was 37 percent.”

Health officials were excited about the improvement.

“Overall we were really pleased,” said Jeff Wolsfeld, health education coordinator for the department. “It’s definitely an improvement.”

Not a single retailer inside the Crescent City limits sold cigarettes to a minor during the operation, Wolsfeld said.

“I told Chief (Douglas) Plack and he was ecstatic that nobody in Crescent City sold cigarettes to a minor,” Wolsfeld said.

According to the press release, the decline in Del Norte County sales to minors could be attributed to a number of things: “information packets being sent out to retailers, new cash register systems that mandate a birth date be entered, state identification cards that clearly indicate the minor is not 18, and most importantly store employees simply following procedures.”

The California Department of Public Health reports that the state average for retailers selling cigarettes to minors was 12.6 percent last year and 10.7 percent in 2007.