

# BURBANK LEADER

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Business

## Merchant buys the first tobacco license

**All sellers of tobacco must ante up by July 1 in a program designed to help prevent underage persons from using the product.**

By Chris Wiebe

BURBANK — About two months after the City Council approved an ordinance governing tobacco sales in Burbank, a local merchant has become the first to purchase a tobacco retailers license.

The license, which all tobacco sellers must obtain by July 1, is intended to cut down on illegal sales of tobacco products to minors by requiring vendors to register with the city.

A local service station owner, Amayak Tarkhanyan, became the first to purchase the license, which costs \$200, along with a \$35 application fee, last week, said License and Code Services Administrator Terre Hirsch.

"The real crux of the ordinance is that you have to have this license to sell," he said. "And if you sell to minors and you get caught, you jeopardize the privilege of having the license. Consequently, the application is keynote in letting us know who the operator is who's going to be responsible."

The License and Code Services Department sent out about 130 notices to area businesses, receiving about 40 response letters in the first two days, he said. If business owners set the application process in motion by June 1, they should have a license in hand by July 1, he added.

"They still have over a month to get it to us, but it does take a day or two to process them," he said. "So we're just hoping that not too many of them wait until the end of the wire, and I don't think they will."

The licenses, which must be renewed annually for \$200, can be suspended or revoked if a retailer is successfully prosecuted for selling tobacco illegally to minors, Hirsch said.

A first violation can mean up to a 30-day suspension; a second violation, within a 5-year period, could result in up to a 90-day suspension.

A third violation could lead to the license being revoked, and the retailer cannot apply for a new license within 60 days of the effective date of revocation, he said.

Enforcement of the ordinance, which is funded by fee proceeds, will be carried out by the Burbank Police Department, which will conduct citywide stings twice per year, Hirsch said.

Officers will also coordinate with the city's License and Code Department to follow on complaints lodged against businesses alleged to be selling tobacco products to minors.

The council's unanimous adoption of the license — which followed three years of study and consideration — reflected a desire to protect minors from the dangers of tobacco, Mayor Marsha Ramos said.

"The tobacco licensing ordinance was embraced by the council because it will be used as a tool to control sales of tobaccos to minors," she said. "Any deterrent we can use to keep youth from developing an addiction to tobacco is a good investment in the community."

As a part of research into whether a licensing ordinance was needed in Burbank, investigators sent underage buyers into 90 stores in Burbank between December 2005 and January 2006.

The study found that 27% of the stores had employees who were willing to sell tobacco products to minors. The California Department of Education also conducted a study showing that 29% of students in Burbank schools have used tobacco.

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