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UNDERAGE PURCHASES

SLO smoking sting nets 14 stores

YOUTH, 16, IS ABLE TO GET TOBACCO OR PIPES AT MORE THAN HALF OF TARGETED SHOPS

SAN LUIS OBISPO

By JEFF BALLINGER
THE TRIBUNE

More than half of the San Luis Obispo stores involved in a tobacco sales sting last week sold tobacco or pipes to an underage teen.

Enlisted by the San Luis Obispo Police Department, a 16-year-old youth

purchased tobacco or pipes at 14 of the 27 stores entered on the late afternoons of Nov. 6 and 7, according to Lloyd Henning, a health educator with the Tobacco Control Program of San Luis Obispo County's Public Health Department.

"It was quite a surprise," Henning said. "I couldn't believe it. ... This 16-year-old was able to purchase tobacco

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quite easily."

The operation's illegal tobacco sales rate of 52 percent was the highest in recent memory, Henning said, and more than three times

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Tobacco

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higher than the state average of 17 percent. The city and county agencies collaborated on the sting.

Previous stings that San Luis Obispo police conducted with the county agency recorded illegal sales of 5 percent in 1999 and none in 1997.

State law prohibits sales of tobacco products and tobacco-related items to anyone under the age of 18.

Why was the rate so high this time in San Luis Obispo?

"I can't really say," Henning said.

He suggested a couple of possibilities, including a high turnover in sales clerks at service stations and convenience stores, causing some employees to not get proper training about the tobacco law.

The sting ruled out one of the leading factors that increase the likelihood of an illegal tobacco sale: familiarity between a clerk and an underage youth. Henning said the youth was from outside the area.

He said the stings, and ensuing publicity about them, help get the word out and reduce illegal sales rates.

Henning also said there is a simple solution:

Busted!

Here are the San Luis Obispo stores that sold tobacco or pipes to a 16-year-old youth during a sting operation conducted Nov. 6-7 by police, in cooperation with the county Public Health Department's Tobacco Control Program:

7-Eleven Food Store at 552 California Blvd.

Foothill Chevron at 151 N. Santa Rosa St.

Cork 'N' Bottle Liquor Store & Deli at 774 Foothill Blvd.

Foothill Texaco on Santa Rosa and Foothill.

Taft and California Apsol 76 at 1340 Taft St.

SLO Downtown Shell at 1101 Monterey St.

Unocal 76 Station on Higuera and Santa Rosa.

Shell Station on Madonna Road near Highway 101.

Sandy's Deli-Liquor at 586 Higuera St.

Sands Liquor Deli at 1930 Monterey St.

Cigarettes Cheaper at 793 Foothill Blvd.

Mission Chevron at 328 Marsh St.

Unity Work at 790 Marsh St.

Hemp Shak at 844 Monterey St.

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