

SMOKEFREE COALITION CALLS FOR ACTION ON CIGARETTE SALES TO CHILDREN

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The Smokefree Coalition (SFC) is calling for a greater focus on reducing illegal sales of cigarettes to young people. The call follows a number of sales to under-18s in the Hawke's Bay and Gisborne areas during recent compliance checks.

"Under the Smoke-free Environments Act, tobacco products cannot be sold to people under the age of 18," says SFC director Mark Peck.

"Previously the Ministry of Health had a strong focus on checking retailers' compliance with this law, but this priority seems to have slipped. The result is an increasing number of sales of a deadly, addictive drug to our teenagers."

The Hawke's Bay and Tairāwhiti District Health Boards recently undertook separate compliance checks, during which 14 to 16 year old volunteers entered shops and asked to buy cigarettes.

There were 14 attempts to purchase cigarettes from Wairoa shops, with three sales; and eight attempts in Central Hawke's Bay, with two sales. In Gisborne, volunteers were sold cigarettes seven times.

"Staff at Hawke's Bay and Tairāwhiti DHBs are to be congratulated for carrying out these operations. Similar compliance checks should be happening regularly, all over the country. Retailers should be in no doubt that if they sell cigarettes to children, they will be caught."

Mr Peck says low fines given out by courts for the sale of cigarettes to under-18s provide little incentive for retailers to comply with the law.

"As a general rule, people convicted of selling cigarettes to minors receive fines of a few hundred dollars, if that. Courts need to impose bigger fines to show that it is never OK to sell drugs to children. We're not dealing with lollies here – tobacco kills one out of two people who continue to use it."

As well as wanting compliance checks increased, Mr Peck is calling upon Government to introduce a requirement for retailers to be licensed before they are allowed to sell cigarettes.

"That way, a retailer who sells cigarettes to someone who is underage can have his licence removed. Cigarettes are a big money earner for retailers, and the threat of losing that income would be a deterrent to illegal sales."

For further information:

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