

MEDIA RELEASE
Smokefree Coalition

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Retailer's penalty for selling cigarettes to kids a 'slap on the wrist with a wet bus ticket'. Stronger action needed!

The Smokefree Coalition says the penalty received by a Carterton retailer convicted twice for selling tobacco to kids is a 'slap on the wrist with a wet bus ticket'.

The comments come after last week's prosecution of a dairy owner for selling tobacco to someone under 18 years of age. It was his second conviction in less than a year. He was barred from selling cigarettes for a month and fined \$750 with an additional \$130 court costs.

The Ministry of Health asked the court, under the Smoke-free Environments Act 1990, to stop all sales of tobacco from the shop for three months, but the judge deemed a one-month ban sufficient.

Smokefree Coalition Director Mark Peck says more must be done to prevent shop-owners from flouting the law.

"A one-month ban is not enough – it's a real shame the full three-month ban was not imposed. These retailers are selling a drug to our kids that is both addictive and deadly.

"This Carterton retailer will be rubbing his hands with glee. After one month it's back to business as usual. Nothing has changed. What chance is there he will change his behaviour and stop selling to kids? Stronger action from the courts is needed."

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

"Courts need to impose harsher penalties 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 for Government to introduce a licensing requirement for retailers, before they are allowed to sell cigarettes.

“There are two benefits to licensing. The first is that retailers will pay the cost for a team of enforcers sufficiently large enough to police the law, and the second is that a retailer who sells cigarettes to someone underage can have their license removed. Cigarettes are a big money earner for retailers, and the threat of losing the licence to sell cigarettes, even if for a short period of time, would be a deterrent to illegal sales,” he says.

“We need to make it clear to business-owners across New Zealand that our society will not tolerate people who expose our children to cigarettes.”

Further information

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