

New educational effort works to reduce tobacco use among young people; only 16 percent of Alabama merchants sell tobacco to minors

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Reducing youth access to tobacco is one approach to decreasing youth tobacco use. A survey of retail merchants found that 16.4 percent Alabama stores surveyed sold tobacco products to underaged youth from October 2000 through September 2001. In November 2001, only 26 stores out of 302 checked sold tobacco illegally to minors. This is a marked improvement over the initial survey in April 1994 when most stores (79 percent) sold tobacco to young people under age 19.

There is an indication that tobacco use is declining among youth. The percentage of Alabama high school students who identified themselves as current smokers in 2000 decreased slightly from surveys conducted in 1999 and 1997. Improvements were shown from 36 percent who self reported smoking in 1997, to 35 percent in 1999, to 30 percent in the year 2000.

The Alabama Alcoholic Beverage Control Board and the Alabama Department of Health are working in cooperation to further reduce tobacco use among young people by promoting a website which offers information to the general public about the state's tobacco use prevention efforts. This site includes links to the ABC Board website.

ABC Administrator Randall Smith said, "As a primary goal, we have worked to enhance collaboration of state agencies and private groups to impact this problem. In the current climate of limited resources, this approach has shown how we are able to maximize our efforts and results.

"We have partnered with the Alabama Department of Public Health to directly limit sales of tobacco products to youth, to educate merchants to the laws and consequences of illegal sales, and to educate young people on the laws and adverse effects of tobacco use. As the enforcement and merchant education agency, the ABC Board works continually with the retail community to lower illegal sales rates. We must reach youth, parents, local law enforcement, educators and justice officials to enlist their aid in combating this problem."

Dr. Donald Williamson, state health officer, said, "We support tobacco sale compliance tests by conducting analyses of results and supporting retail merchant education programs. We are making these results available to the public to help them participate in their community in reducing youth access to tobacco as one approach to decreasing youth tobacco use."

The Alabama Department of Public Health has tobacco education coordinators in many of the public health areas who work with ABC officials in their tobacco compliance efforts and who work with community groups to develop or support efforts which will reduce tobacco use among youth.

To learn about the results of the most recent 12 months of tobacco compliance checks, log on to the Alabama Department of Public Health website at <http://www.adph.org/tobacco>. Click on the “compliance checks” section at the top of the tobacco page to find those months that are posted, and click on the survey month you would like to view. The information is organized alphabetically by county, and within each county, alphabetically by city.

The Youth Tobacco Survey of middle and high school students which found a decrease in smoking among young people was administered for the first time in Alabama in the spring of 2000. Approximately 1,350 students in 87 schools participated in the survey, which included questions concerning tobacco use; purchase patterns; knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs about tobacco and its risks; awareness of and receptiveness to tobacco advertising; and other key topics. The self-reported results found:

- The proportion of students who have tried tobacco is greater among males compared to females across all grade levels and greater among white students compared to black students.
- The most common methods reported by high school smokers to obtain cigarettes included buying them from a store (36 percent), giving someone else the money to purchase the cigarettes (27 percent) and borrowing them from someone else (26 percent.)

The ABC Board website at <http://www.abcboard.state.al.us> describes its activities, including those relating to tobacco.

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