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Tobacco sales to youth slip

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Fewer youths are buying tobacco in San Francisco.

Illegal sales of tobacco to youngsters was down more than two percent between June 2011 and June 2013, according to figures released Tuesday by the San Francisco Department of Public Health.

Much of the decline can be attributed to rigorous enforcement, including sting operations by the San Francisco Police Department, and a robust education program designed to alert retailers to the potential consequences of selling tobacco products to young people, according to health plan coordinator Derek Smith.

Of the 1,016 licensed tobacco retailers in the city, 454 were the target of sting operations during this period. Police issued 61 citations to stores willing to sell tobacco products to 16- and 17-year-old decoys who could not produce identification.

Retailers caught selling tobacco products to minors can have their permits revoked for 25-30 days and the individuals responsible for the sale can be ticketed and fined.

While the dip in scofflaw merchants is encouraging, the city still has a rate of illegal tobacco sales nearly five percentage points higher than the state average. Of the retailers visited by police in San Francisco decoys, 13.4 percent sold tobacco to the undercover decoys. Statewide, that number drops to 8.7 percent.

The high rate is likely due to the fact that San Francisco is a small city with high population density and large concentrations of tobacco retailers in low-income neighborhoods like the Tenderloin and Hunter's Point, Smith said.

Research conducted by the Tobacco Use Reduction Force, a group of seven young people who each represent a different neighborhood, found that of the more than 1000 tobacco retailers in the city, 517 were located in just three of the eleven districts, all with a lower than average median income.

"These high concentrations normalize the use of tobacco in disadvantaged communities," said Avni Desai, program coordinator at the Youth Leadership Institute, which runs the TURF program. "It creates a health disparity."

Posted By: [Kale Williams](#) (Email) | Jul 02 at 5:11 pm

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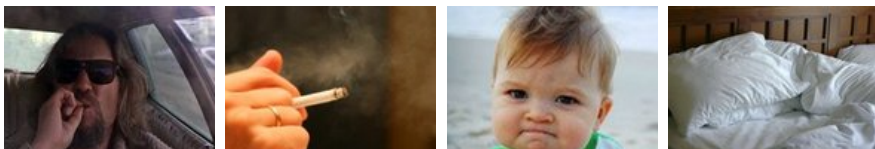
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