

# NEWS

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**For Immediate Release**

## **Retailers That Sell Tobacco to Kids Face Stiffer Penalties**

**Redwood City** – The San Mateo County Board of Supervisors today voted unanimously to increase penalties on businesses that sell cigarettes and other tobacco products to minors.

Proposed by County Health, the increased penalties are intended to discourage retailers from taking the risk of selling tobacco products to minors and help prevent youth from getting hooked on nicotine. In California, 67 percent of current and former smokers report that they started smoking by the age of 18.

“When we discuss these issues, what we are really talking about is saving lives,” said Warren Slocum, who represents [District 4](#) on the Board of Supervisors. “We need to put teeth into enforcement for two big reasons: one is that we need to make the penalty large enough to negate the profit in selling to minors. And two, we need to do everything we can to keep cigarettes and other tobacco products out of the hands of kids. Most adult smokers began when they were not old enough to legally buy tobacco products.”

The increased penalties will “strengthen the ordinance's provisions to reduce youth access to tobacco products” in unincorporated San Mateo County. The biggest hammer is a provision that requires a permit be suspended if a business is found to have sold tobacco products to persons under the age of 21.

In the past, retailers may have received a warning or letter of reprimand if caught selling tobacco to minors.

The updated ordinance also:

- Increases fines up to \$500 for a first violation, and up to \$1,000 for all subsequent violations within a 60-month period.
- Prohibits issuing new Tobacco Retailer Permits to any location within 1,000 feet of a “youth-populated area” (public or private school, playgrounds, for instance) or within 500 feet of an existing tobacco retailer.

- Mandates a fine for any ordinance violations.
- Increases the number of required on-site inspections by County Environmental Health Services to two a year.

The addition of two inspections per year for all tobacco retailers increases the annual permit fee from \$174 to \$672.

County staff will encourage cities within San Mateo County to adopt the updated tobacco retailer permit ordinance.

“Young people in our community are healthier when tobacco retailers are held accountable for selling tobacco products illegally to underage customers,” said Clara Boyden, deputy director of Behavioral Health and Recovery Services, who oversees the tobacco program for County Health.

According to County Health, from April 2021 to June 2022 a total of 11 of 74 tobacco retailers in San Mateo County sold to underage youth decoys during Sheriff Office enforcement operations. That’s about 15 percent.

Limiting youth access to tobacco products in retail is a key component of a comprehensive tobacco prevention strategy.

In 1998, the Board of Supervisors established one of the state’s earliest Tobacco Retailer Permit programs. Since then, the County has updated the ordinance to keep up with shifting tobacco delivery models with the proliferation of electronic cigarettes and flavored tobacco, for instance.

Learn more about [County Health’s efforts](#) to promote smoke-free homes, limit the availability of tobacco products in retail environments, and provide resources for individuals interested in quitting smoking.

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