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Press Release

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Alaska's tobacco sales to minors continues to improve

Record-low sales to minors dip below national rate; state thanks vigilant vendors

(Anchorage, AK) — When undercover youth approached Alaska vendors for tobacco in 2009, they were illegally allowed to buy tobacco 9 percent of the time, the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services recently reported to federal officials. The federally required sales data is gathered each year and published as the Synar report. The most recent national rate, from 2007, is 9.9 percent.

Alaska sellers continue to improve their performance, down from 34.3 percent in 1997, the first year measured. Alaska's 2009 rate of 9 percent is its lowest yet.

"Tobacco use remains by far the leading cause of preventable death in the U.S.," said Alaska Health and Social Services Commissioner Bill Hogan. "We at the Department thank vigilant vendors and their employees for their professionalism and their commitment to the health of young Alaskans."

Of the 439 vendors approached, 408 did not sell tobacco illegally.

"Preventing youth from starting tobacco use is a key part of Alaska's plan to reduce tobacco-related death and disease," said L. Diane Casto, manager of the section of Prevention & Early Intervention Services in the state Division of Behavioral Health. The state's plan is based on practices recommended by the national Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that have been proven to work, and it's getting results in Alaska.

Alaska's 2009 Youth Risk Behavior Survey found that 15.7 percent of high school students smoked in the past 30 days, down from 17.8 percent in 2007 and 36.5 percent in 1995.

Of students who said they currently used tobacco, nearly 60 percent reported they'd tried to quit in the past year.

In state fiscal year 2008, funding for state tobacco prevention and enforcement programs totaled \$8.82 million. By contrast, the tobacco industry spent an estimated \$28.1 million annually on marketing in Alaska.

For a list of vendors who did not sell to minors and the full Synar report, visit <http://hss.state.ak.us/dbh/prevention>.

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