
Friday, 26 September 2014

LOCAL BUSINESSES CAUGHT SELLING TOBACCO TO MINORS

Tobacco retailers in South Eastern Sydney are being warned they face hefty fines if they are caught selling cigarettes to children.

The warning comes after three people were handed fines of up to \$1000 for selling cigarettes to minors following an investigation by the South Eastern Sydney Public Health Unit.

The fines were handed down at Sutherland Local Court on 17 September 2014 and saw a shop owner from Cronulla fined \$1000, a shop assistant from Sylvania Waters fined \$500 while a shop assistant in Caringbah was fined \$350.

Public health workers are hoping the fines will act as a deterrent and send a strong message to all tobacco retailers.

Under the *Public Health (Tobacco) Act 2008*, it is a criminal offence to sell cigarettes to people under the age of 18. The maximum fine for this offence is \$11,000 for an individual for a first offence, \$55,000 for any second or subsequent offence; \$55,000 in the case of a corporation for a first offence and \$110,000 for a second or subsequent offence.

Julie Dixon, Director of Planning and Population at South Eastern Sydney Local Health District, said: "Despite long efforts to educate and remind retailers of the penalties they could face if caught selling cigarettes to children, it is worrying that young people are still able to buy these products from some shops.

"NSW Health has a compliance monitoring strategy in which volunteer young people attempt to buy cigarettes from local retailers.

"It was this approach that led to these businesses being caught out. Thirty-five shops were randomly targeted during our recent blitz of tobacco retailers and three did not comply with their responsibilities under the public health law.

"Everybody selling tobacco should already know their responsibilities under the law. There really should be no excuse. These laws have been in place for a long time. Retailers might think it is good for business but it is not good for our young people."

Most smokers start smoking before they are 18, and research has shown that over 20 per cent of 12-17 year-olds who smoke buy their own cigarettes.

It has been shown that the younger the person is when they start smoking the less likely it is that they will ever stop.

All members of the community can help reduce children's access to cigarettes by reporting possible breaches of the law to the Public Health Unit on 02 9382 8333 or to the Tobacco Information Line on 1800 357 412. All complaints will be dealt with confidentially.

Media contacts:

South Eastern Sydney Local Health District: Alison Purdy 0428 628 722.

“This is a warning to all tobacco retail outlets. If you sell tobacco products to children you are breaking the law and you can expect to be prosecuted,” Ms Dixon said.

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