

Friday 1 July 2016

LOCAL BUSINESSES CAUGHT SELLING TOBACCO TO MINORS

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

It comes after three people were fined up to \$1000 last month for selling cigarettes to children as young as 15 following compliance checks by the South Eastern Sydney Public Health Unit.

The fines were handed down on Thursday 16 June at Waverley Local Court and saw a Bondi shop owner fined \$1000, a Bondi Junction shop owner fined \$1000 and the wife of a North Randwick shop owner fined \$500.

The magistrate recorded no convictions in three other cases including a Bondi Junction shop employee who sold cigarettes to 15-year-old minors.

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)*, it is a criminal offence to sell cigarettes, non-tobacco smoking products, e-cigarettes and e-cigarette accessories to people under the age of 18.

The maximum fine for this offence is \$11,000 for an individual for the 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.

Professor Mark Ferson, Director of the South Eastern Sydney Local Health District Public Health Unit said that despite long efforts to educate and remind retailers of the penalties they could face if caught selling cigarettes to children, it was worrying that young people were still able to buy these products from some shops.

“Everybody selling tobacco should already know their responsibilities under the law,” Professor Ferson said. “There should really be no excuse”.

Those caught selling cigarettes to minors provided a number of excuses in court for not asking for ID including that they were distracted by a crying child; that the shop was very busy at the time and that the young people looked like university students.

Most smokers start smoking before they are 18. It has been shown that the younger the person is when they start smoking the harder it is for them to quit.

All members of the community can help reduce children’s access to cigarettes and e-cigarettes by reporting suspected breaches of the law to the Public Health Unit on 9382 8333 or to the Tobacco Information Line on 1800 357 412. All complaints are dealt with confidentially.

For help quitting smoking, visit icanquit.com.au or call the Quitline on 13 78 48.

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