

Home

News

Sports

Business

Lifestyles

Births & Deaths

Columns

Editorials

Around Town

Weather

Bus Routes

Movies

Visitors Guide

Attractions

Accommodations

Restaurants

Entertainment

About

Contacts

Comments

Newsletter

Online Advertising

History

Privacy

Top Stories - Lifestyles

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Operation I.D. School Zone rolled out across province

By Doug Gallant, The Guardian

Operation I.D. School Zone, a groundbreaking program aimed at eliminating the sale of tobacco to minors by concentrating on areas of higher risk like school grounds, is being rolled out across the province.

The expansion of the program, already in place in Charlottetown and Summerside, was announced at a recent news conference in the provincial capital.

Announced at the same time was the appointment of a provincial advisory council to oversee the program's implementation.

Lorraine Robinson, who co-chairs the provincial advisory council with Tom DeBlois, says provincial retail compliance with Canada's Tobacco Act and the law prohibiting underage tobacco sales currently stands at 85 per cent.

"Eight out of 10 tobacco retailers in P.E.I. said 'no' when approached by a minor attempting to purchase tobacco," Robinson said.

But there are still a number of retailers selling cigarettes to minors and a number of adults, particularly young adults, purchasing cigarettes for them.

The level of compliance was measured by SES Canada Research Inc. following mystery shops conducted among tobacco retailers across the province this spring.

Nik Nanos, president of SES Canada Research Inc., said his company sent three compliance research teams out to see if they could purchase cigarettes from retailers without ID.

They visited 194 retailers across P.E.I. between March 28 and April 17.

"We found that 17 out of 20 retailers refused to sell tobacco to minors and that 20 of the 30 non-compliant clerks were under 25 years of age."

Robinson said they were encouraged by the study results.



Members of the provincial advisory council for Operation I.D. School Zone display some of the promotional materials displayed by retailers as part of a campaign to discourage the sale of cigarettes to minors. Committee members are, from left, Const. Gary Clow, committee co-chair Lorraine Robinson, Cynthia MacLeod and Jane Kennedy of Ultramar. (GUARDIAN PHOTO BY DOUG GALLANT)

“Operation I.D. School Zone has been up and running in Charlottetown and Summerside for a number of years and we knew that the program was having an impact on retail behaviour in the province so we were encouraged by the recent compliance results compiled by SES.”

She stressed, however, that they were concerned youth tobacco access and use was still a problem on the Island, which is why they asked to have the survey done.

Between May 7 and 11, the research company conducted a total of 500 telephone interviews among residents of P.E.I. aged 19 years and older.

That research revealed a significant number of Islanders did not know the legal age required to purchase tobacco products and that young adults are five times more likely to know someone who has asked to purchase tobacco for underage teenagers.

“We estimate that in the past six months, over 2,800 underage teenagers were able to purchase cigarettes through an adult buyer,” said Nanos. “Although provincial compliance among tobacco retailers is relatively high, there appears to be a need to raise the public’s awareness on the issue of third-party sales.”

Young adults purchasing tobacco on behalf of minors were the primary focus of the news conference and will be a key issue for the newly appointed Operation I.D. School Zone provincial advisory council.

Robinson said the council will work toward getting to the heart of the matter regarding youth tobacco access and use.

“We will facilitate the expansion of the Charlottetown and Summerside Operation I.D. School Zone program across the Island; increase public awareness on the issue of young adults purchasing tobacco products on behalf of minors; develop a working relationship with government decision makers on tobacco and youth related issues, provincial fines and penalty structures; and provide input, knowledge and expertise on tobacco reduction strategies in the area of youth access programs.”

Members of the advisory council include representatives of groups and organizations across the province, including: Gary Connelly, Charlottetown Rocket hockey club; Const. Gary Clow, Charlottetown City Police; Summerside Police Chief Ian Drummond; John MacDonald, Summerside Chamber of Commerce; youth representative Cynthia MacLeod; Jane Kennedy of Ultramar; and Lorin Brehaut, a retired retailer.

Since the launch of Operation I.D. School Zone in P.E.I., program managers have visited retailers and provided store managers and staff with the tools they need to deny underage tobacco sales.

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All Section Stories - Text Only