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LOCAL NEWS

Some stores still selling minors smokes - study

By CATHY NICOLL

The Daily News

Underage Halifax teens can still buy smokes at nearly a quarter of the 129 corner stores near their schools, says a twice-yearly survey released Tuesday.

The latest compliance study done for Operation I.D. School Zone, running in Halifax for three years, found that 77 per cent of 129 retailers in Halifax within one kilometre of a school refused to sell cigarettes to minors under the age of 19.

Last spring, a survey found that 75 per cent of store owners toed the line. The highest level of compliance was 84 per cent in the spring of 2001.

Undercover research teams with SES Canada Research Inc., made up of a 17-year-old girl and an adult observer, visited area stores between Sept. 19 and 21.

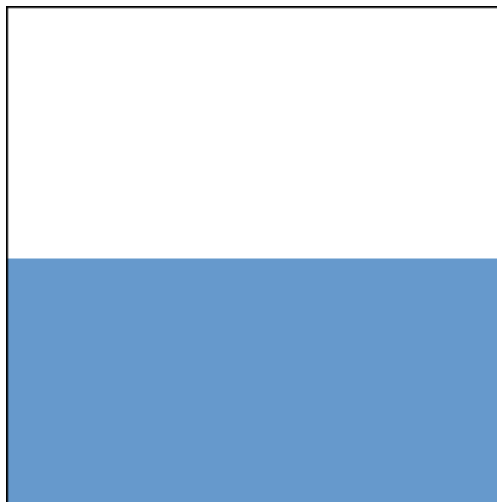
The success of the program often depends on the young clerks who work at most corner stores. The survey found that if they were older than the minor, but younger than 25, 69 per cent were compliant, while 73 per cent of senior clerks enforced the law.

Also, 69 per cent of male clerks, compared with 85 per cent of female clerks, asked for photo identification.

'Ultimate goal'

Halifax Regional Police Const. Ian Burke, co-chairman of the Operation I.D. steering committee, said 100 per cent compliance is the "ultimate

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goal," and it's up to everyone to try to reach it.

"The only way to push beyond (77 per cent compliance) is to keep busy in the stores, letting the store owners and their employees know that it is illegal," he said.

"One of the things that retailers have to realize, and people who visit these stores to make a purchase, is that they have to be patient, and that ID has to be asked for. The people going in have to realize that if you're 19 or 20 years old, you may be asked for ID."

Burke said it's up to the provincial Tobacco Control Unit to charge retailers if they continuously break the law.

"We're just a support service for the retailers themselves," he said.


But Burke said members of the public can contact the unit if they see retailers selling tobacco to underage kids.

Operation I.D. School Zone is a community-based program funded by Canada's tobacco manufacturers.

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