

NEW MEXICO DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH
Secretary Dr. Alfredo Vigil

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New Mexico Successfully Prevents Tobacco Sales to Minors

(Santa Fe) – Health Secretary Dr. Alfredo Vigil congratulated tobacco merchants in New Mexico for achieving the lowest rate of illegal tobacco sales to minors since the surveillance program began. The New Mexico Department of Health began conducting random, unannounced inspections of tobacco outlets in 1997 to make sure retailers do not sell tobacco products to minors.

“We thank our retailers for caring about the health of our young people and working hard to ensure they are complying with federal and state laws that make it illegal to sell tobacco products to minors,” Dr. Vigil said.

The federal government requires that states must have at least 80 percent of its retailers enforcing laws that prohibit the sale and distribution of tobacco products to individuals younger than 18. New Mexico’s rate is 94 percent. When the Department of Health began the survey program in 1997, the compliance rate was 77 percent.

The Department’s Office of Substance Abuse Prevention gives merchants selling tobacco a comprehensive education about adhering to the federal law and the New Mexico Tobacco Products Act. The office also contracts with the Department of Public Safety to conduct education and compliance checks in some areas of the state. The Department of Public Safety can cite violators.

The U.S. Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration reported that the national average of illegal tobacco sales to minors has dropped since the program’s inception from 40.1 percent in fiscal year 1997 to 10.5 percent in fiscal year 2007, the report said.

The Department of Health also works with communities, schools and organizations across the state to promote healthy, tobacco-free lifestyles and reduce tobacco-related illnesses. The Department’s Tobacco Use Prevention and Control Program is a comprehensive, evidence-based public health program aimed at reducing the health and economic burden caused by tobacco. People who want to quit using tobacco can call the Department’s toll-free, bilingual help line, 1-800-QUIT NOW from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. seven days a week.

Services available at 1-800-QUIT NOW (1-800-784-8669) include a free quit plan and free sessions with a coach. Free nicotine patches or gum are mailed directly to 1-800-QUIT NOW participants, as appropriate. Participants also receive free materials that will help them stay on track with their quit plan.

Cigarette smoking rates among New Mexico high school students has decreased from 30.2 percent in 2003 to 24.2 percent in 2007, according to the Department’s surveys of 9th to 12th graders.

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