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ILLEGAL TOBACCO SALES TO MINORS THREATEN CHILDREN'S HEALTH

Oklahoma tobacco retailers are increasingly not complying with state law regarding underage tobacco sales. Last year, Oklahoma tobacco retailers posted an overall non-compliance rate of about 18 percent. That's troubling for local prevention professionals who say that the rising underage tobacco sales rate means that some retailers are placing profit ahead of young lives. It also risks federal funding that supports vital Oklahoma health initiatives.

In July 1992, Congress enacted the Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and Mental Health Administration Reorganization Act (PL 102-321), which includes an amendment (section 1926) aimed at decreasing youth access to tobacco. This amendment, named for its sponsor, Congressman Mike Synar of Oklahoma, requires states to enact and enforce laws prohibiting the sale or distribution of tobacco products to individuals under the age of 18.

States are required to have a compliance rate of at least 80 percent (or a non-compliance rate of no more than 20 percent) regarding the sale of tobacco products to minors, and must demonstrate compliance in order to receive their full Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant (SABG) award.

“In 2012 the non-compliance rate was only 6.8 percent, the lowest ever recorded in Oklahoma, however that rate has steadily increased ever since,” said (Cochran), (RPC Director, Red Rock RPC). “While the majority of retailers are complying with the law, there are some in our community choosing to ignore it and in turn risking the health of our children. That is unacceptable.”

Unannounced compliance checks occur annually in communities throughout Oklahoma. (Cochran) reminds local retailers that it is important to be aware of the law and ensure that all staff are trained to prevent underage tobacco sales.

Community-based education is available to business owners and clerks regarding youth access to tobacco. This service is free. Retailers may contact (Red Rock RPC) at (405-250-9696) for more information.

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Editor's Note: Local results regarding last year's compliance checks are included as part of this release. Information about the Synar Amendment can be found at <https://www.samhsa.gov/synar>.