

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 12, 2010

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ND sees record-setting decline in tobacco sales to minors during the decade

BISMARCK, N.D. – Tobacco sales to minors decreased by two-thirds over the past decade according to North Dakota Department of Human Services (DHS) officials. The results are part of a federally-mandated tobacco compliance survey the department conducts statewide each year.

In 2009, minors made 180 attempts to purchase tobacco products and were successful 11 times for a violation rate of 6.1 percent. In comparison, the violation rate was 18 percent in 1999. The 2008 survey revealed a record-low violation rate of 1.7 percent in the state. The 2009 rate is more typical of recent years.

“Results from the department’s compliance checks in the past 10 years indicate that great strides have been made in the retail sector to not sell tobacco products to underage smokers,” said Michaela Schirado, a research analyst with the Department of Human Services. “Our violation rate goal is 10 percent, and we are well under that figure.”

The statewide survey was conducted between July and September 2009. Minors work under adult supervision and attempt to purchase tobacco products at randomly selected licensed tobacco retail sites in the state.

“This is the thirteenth year the department has conducted this survey,” said the department’s director Carol K. Olson. “There is great value in promoting awareness and training among retailers to prevent tobacco sales to minors.”

These compliance checks do not involve area law enforcement. States are required to conduct the annual scientific survey in order to receive federal Substance Abuse Prevention and Treatment Block Grant funding. Currently, if compliance rates are at or above 20 percent, a state could lose up to 40 percent of its block grant funding.

In 2009, DHS received \$5.3 million from this block grant, which was used for public substance abuse treatment through the department’s eight regional human service centers.

Survey results are available on the department’s website at <http://www.nd.gov/dhs/info/pubs/docs/mhsa/ff2010-abstract-synar-report.pdf>

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