

S. Tahoe retailers abide by tobacco sales law

Out of 142 retail stores surveyed during the past two months in El Dorado County, 32 sold tobacco to underage youth.

The majority of stores that sold tobacco to kids were located in the unincorporated areas of the county, but nearly every community had at least one store that sold. The only exception was South Lake Tahoe where no store engaged in the illegal activity.

The Youth Tobacco Purchase Survey was conducted Feb. 13 in South Lake Tahoe and on Jan. 10 on the West Slope by El Dorado County sheriff's deputies, Placerville and South Lake Tahoe police officers, and Tobacco Use Prevention Program staff.

Trained youth volunteers between 14-17 entered retail stores and attempted to buy cigarettes and other tobacco products. The legal age to buy tobacco is 18. Merchants who sold tobacco to youth received citations from law enforcement; those who did not sell tobacco were thanked by law enforcement.

Tobacco retailers are required by law to check identification, verify age and post state mandated age-of-sale warning signs. Tobacco and tobacco products must be behind the sales counter or in a locked display.

A similar youth purchase survey conducted in 2012 in El Dorado County found that 11 percent of retailers sold tobacco to kids.

"We aren't sure why the sales rates have gone up so much in this most recent survey compared to only a few years ago," Christy White, project director for the El Dorado County Tobacco Use Prevention Program, said in a press release. "We have conducted education to merchants numerous times over the

past ten years, but stores often have frequent clerk and owner turnover. It is a continual challenge to ensure they are aware of, and following, the law.”

– *Lake Tahoe News staff report*