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Local businesses fined for selling tobacco to minors and illicit cigarettes

Tobacco retailers in South Eastern Sydney are being warned they may face heavy fines and bans if they sell tobacco products to minors or sell illicit, under the counter cigarettes.

The warning from South Eastern Sydney Local Health District's (SESLHD) Public Health Unit comes after an employee of a CBD 7 Eleven store was fined \$1,100 for selling tobacco to a 16 year old. A Haymarket tobacconist and a nearby convenience store were also fined \$5,500 and \$7,500 respectively for selling illicit tobacco.

The fines were handed down recently at the Downing Centre Local Court and recently a Double Bay tobacconist was issued with a \$360 Penalty Infringement Notice for displaying smoking accessories visible to the public.

Professor Mark Ferson, Director, SESLHD Public Health Unit, said most smokers start the habit before they are 18 and it has been shown that the younger a person is when they start smoking, the less likely it is that they will ever quit.

"Shops that sell cigarettes to minors or illicit, black market tobacco to anyone will be caught and prosecuted," Professor Ferson said.

"Plain packaging and graphic health warnings are effective in helping smokers quit. Illicit tobacco, which is always sold much cheaper, encourages smoking."

Under the Public Health (Tobacco) Act 2008, it is an offence to sell tobacco, e-cigarettes and their accessories to minors, or to sell single cigarettes or tobacco products without appropriate health warnings. The maximum penalty for a first offence is \$11,000 for an individual, increasing to \$55,000 for repeated breaches, and up to \$110,000 for corporations.

"Compliance with the legislation is closely monitored. Authorised officers from the Public Health Unit conduct random inspections and can issue warnings or initiate prosecutions against retailers that break the law," Professor Ferson said.

Since 2014, the NSW Government, through the Cancer Institute NSW, has invested more than \$70 million on anti-tobacco public education campaigns and tobacco control initiatives. The NSW Ministry of Health and Cancer Institute NSW have invested \$17.3 million on tobacco control in 2019-20. This includes public awareness and education campaigns, quit smoking support, compliance and enforcement of strong smoke-free and retailing laws, and targeted programs for vulnerable groups with high smoking rates.

NSW has seen a consistent downward trend in the prevalence of smoking. Among NSW adults, smoking has decreased from 22.5% in 2002 to 14.8% in 2018.

Pleasingly, fewer young people are smoking in general, with rates declining from 10.3% in 2005 to 6.4% in 2017.

All members of the community can help reduce children's access to cigarettes and vapes, and the sale of unbranded tobacco, by reporting suspected breaches of the law to the Public Health Unit on 9382 8333 or to the Tobacco Information Line on 1800 357 412. All complaints are dealt with confidentially.

To seek help to quit smoking, visit icanquit.com.au or call the Quitline on 13 78 48.