

Tobacco Retailers: Gatekeepers for Idaho Youth

By Cheryl Dudley

Tobacco Most Addicting For Teens

If cigarette smoking is the most preventable cause of death, what keeps smokers from quitting? Everyone knows that cigarettes are addictive, but knowing why they are so addictive may shed some light on the issue.

First of all, it is important to note that the majority of addicted smokers begin smoking as teens. Experts suggest a variety of reasons that teens start smoking, including low self-esteem, a desire to lose weight, peer pressure, alluring advertising, and rebellion. It is also important to note that no teen starts smoking with the intention of becoming addicted. As a matter of fact, many believe that they can quit whenever they choose. But statistics prove that the power of the chemical addiction is more often stronger than the desire to quit.

The addiction to cigarette smoking is linked to its ability to stimulate feelings of pleasure. Scientists have recently discovered that the nicotine in cigarettes raises the level of dopamine in the brain. Dopamine is a neurotransmitter that produces feelings of well-being and comfort. For this reason, in addition to its appetite suppressant abilities, cigarettes are difficult to give up, particularly if the smoker began at a young age.

According to Bill Hazie, Medical Director of Portneuf Medical Center's Behavioral Health Center in Pocatello, "Tobacco use is a chronic addiction that gets progressively worse over time." Consequently, over five million children in the U.S. who are now under the age of 18 will die prematurely as a result of smoking cigarettes

during their teen years. As a matter of fact, one-third of all youth smokers ultimately dies or suffers from tobacco-related health problems.

Because most teens may not understand the profound impact that cigarette smoking can have on their life and their health, lawmakers have taken the responsibility of preventing them from trying that first cigarette. The truth is, the only way to prevent addiction to cigarettes is to never start smoking in the first place.

In light of the addictive characteristics of tobacco, particularly to those who start smoking as teen-agers, the importance of tobacco retailers' role in preventing the sale of tobacco to minors is hugely important. Tobacco retailers are, in a sense, gatekeepers for Idaho's youth. Blocking minors' access to tobacco products can make a difference in the deadly statistics.

How Did We Do?

For April 2004
Grade "A"

According to Idaho Code 39-5701 the Idaho Department of Health and Welfare must inspect each business that sells tobacco to ensure that it does not sell tobacco to minors. For April of 2004:

- ◆ 311 Vendors were inspected. *
- ◆ 29 Vendors sold to the inspecting minor.
- ◆ The compliance rate for the month of April, 2004 was 91%.

*Inspections where purchase attempts were made.

Did You Know?

- According to the 2003 Idaho Youth Risk Behavior Survey, one in six Idaho students have smoked by the age of 13.
- Each day in the United States 4,000 kids will try their first cigarette and each day more than 2,000 other kids will become regular, daily smokers.
- Approximately 3,700 Idaho kids (under 18) become new daily smokers each year
- Idaho kids purchase or smoke approximately 3.1 million packs of cigarettes each year.
- 12,400 of Idaho high school students smoke
- 9% of Idaho male high school students use smokeless or spit tobacco

Barb's Story

Barb Tarbox started smoking when she was in the seventh grade. At the age of 41, she was diagnosed with terminal lung cancer, which soon spread to her entire body. But instead of giving up, Barb decided to use her last days to try and convince young people to either stop smoking, or to never start. She traveled to different schools and spoke, inspiring not only kids, but parents as well. Seeing the impact of smoking firsthand, many parents quit smoking in order to spare their children the pain of watching a parent die of cancer. After speaking at one junior high school, Barb received 750 letters, and by the time she died on May 18, 2003, she had impacted 50,000 young people across the country. Her husband Pat and 10-year-old daughter McKenzie openly share the story of their lost loved one and how smoking impacted their lives.

Your Vigilance To Refuse The Sale of Tobacco to Youth Has Made a Difference

VOLUME 03. NUMBER 5 MAY, 2004



WHAT'S INSIDE!

- ◆ Tobacco's addiction
- ◆ Barb's story
- ◆ How did we do?

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