

Prevent the Sale!

Newsletter for Idaho Tobacco Retailers

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Sponsored by Idaho Department of Health & Welfare

VOLUME 06, NUMBER 3

MARCH 2007

The Power of Addiction

By Cheryl Dudley

Facts and Stats

"B" Average for FEBRUARY

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. In FEBRUARY 2007:

- ❖ 136 Vendors were inspected.*
- ❖ 21 Vendors sold to the inspecting minor.
- ❖ The compliance rate for the month of February 2007 was 85%

*Inspections where purchase attempts were made.

Prevent the Sale Web site

www.preventthesale.com/idaho

- Learn about the law
- Take the tobacco quiz
- See what the ID's look like
- Play the Game "Would You Sell to This Person?"

The Gatekeepers' Mission

This month's newsletter includes a heart-wrenching story of Bryan—one smoker's final story. Like many smokers who are diagnosed with terminal cancer, this victim wanted to share his story in hopes that he might convince others to quit smoking before it's too late.

As a tobacco vendor, your influence can be as far-reaching as Bryan's. By refusing to sell tobacco to minors, you are performing a service to the state of Idaho that no one else has the power to do. As gatekeepers to tobacco products, you can ensure that tobacco does not reach the hands of our vulnerable youth. Ninety percent of smokers begin smoking as teens, and cancer is claiming victims at younger and younger ages because of it. You can help change these statistics.

As the inspection teams make their 2007 rounds to Idaho businesses, be sure you have practiced saying "No" to minors. Know how to identify false identifications, and make sure you have the courage to face defiant or belligerent teens. Although the inspecting minor will never challenge your refusal to sell tobacco, other teens may. Be prepared. Visit our website, and know the law. Become a part of the solution to the nation's tobacco addiction, not the problem. Citizens of the state of Idaho depend on you.

"If you use nicotine, then nicotine will get you eventually, unless you are murdered or have a fatal accident. It will give you a heart attack, stroke, or cancer. It can happen; it happened to me. It happens every day. The real crime is that a drug which is that addictive is legal in the first place."
Cheryl, a cancer victim who died June 30, 2005.

"He Wanted You to Know" by Sue Landry

Cigarette smoke hangs in the air in the room where Bryan Lee Curtis lay dying of lung cancer. His head, bald from chemotherapy, lolls on a pillow. The bones of his cheeks and shoulders protrude under taut skin. His eyes are open, but he can no longer respond to his mother or his wife, Bobbie, who married him in a makeshift ceremony in this room three weeks ago after doctors said there was no hope. In Bryan's emaciated hands, Bobbie has propped a photograph taken just two months ago. It shows a muscular and seemingly healthy Bryan holding his 2-year-old son; Bryan Jr. Bryan is 33 in the photo. He turned 34 in May.

A pack of cigarettes and a lighter sit on a table near Bryan's bed in his mother's living room. Even though tobacco caused the cancer now eating through his lungs and liver, Bryan smoked until a week ago, when it became impossible. Across the room, a 20-year-old nephew crushes out a cigarette in a large glass ashtray where the butt joins a dozen others. Bobbie Curtis says she'll try to stop after the funeral, but right now, it's just too difficult. Same for Bryan's mother, Louise Curtis. "I just can't do it now," she says, although she hopes maybe she can after the funeral.

Bryan knew how hard it is to quit. And when he learned he would die because of his habit, he thought maybe he could persuade at least a few kids not to pick up that first cigarette. Maybe if they could see his sunken cheeks, how hard it was to breathe, his shriveled body, it might scare them enough. So a man whose life was otherwise unremarkable set out in the last few weeks of his life with a mission.

Bryan started smoking when he was just 13, building up to more than two

packs a day. He talked about quitting from time to time, but never seriously tried. Plenty of time for that, he figured. Older people got cancer. Not people in their 30s, not people who worked in construction, as a roofer, as a mechanic. He was more worried about his mother, 57, who had smoked since she was 25. "He would say, "Mom, don't worry about me. Worry about yourself. I'm healthy," Louise Curtis remembers. "You think this would happen later, when you're 60 or 70 years old, not when you're 34."

He knew, only a few days after he went to the hospital with severe abdominal pain, how wrong he had been. He had oat cell lung cancer that had spread to his liver. He probably had not had it long. Also called small cell lung cancer, it's an aggressive killer that usually claims the lives of its victims within a few months.

While it seems unusual to the Curtis family, Bryan's oncologist, said he is seeing more lung cancer in young adults.

"We've seen lung cancer earlier and earlier because people are starting to smoke earlier and earlier," he said. Chemotherapy sometimes slows the process, but had little affect in Bryan's case.

Bryan also knew a few days after the diagnosis that he wanted somehow to try to save at least one kid from the same fate. He sat down and talked with Bryan

Jr. and his 9-year-old daughter, Amber, who already had been caught once with a cigarette. But he wanted to do more. Somehow, he had to get his story out.

When he still had some strength to leave the house, kids would stare. "They'd come up and look at him because he looked so strange," Louise Curtis said. "He'd look at them and say, 'This is what happens to you when you smoke.'"

In the last few weeks of Bryan's life, his mother was the agent for his mission to accomplish some good with the tragedy. She called newspapers and radio and television stations, seeking someone willing to tell her son's story, willing to help give him the one thing he wanted before he died. Bryan never got to tell his story to the public. He spoke for the last time an hour before a visit from a Times reporter and photographer. "I can't fight anymore," he whispered to his mother. He died just nine weeks after the diagnosis at the age of 34.

Bryan Lee Curtis Sr. was buried on a dark cloudy day that threatened rain. At the funeral service his casket was open, and 50 friends and relatives saw the devastating effects of the cancer.

But addiction is more powerful than grief. As the graveside ritual ended, a handful of relatives backed away from the gathering, pulled out packs of cigarettes and lit up.

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What's Inside:

- *You—The Gatekeeper's Mission**
- *He Wanted You to Know**
- *Facts and Stats**

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