

Success Story

Title: Columbia County Tobacco Retail Assessment: What's for sale in our Community?

County: Columbia

TPEP Coordinator: Ashley Baggett

The Project:

The Public Health Foundation Tobacco Prevention Coordinator and Columbia Community Mental Health Prevention Specialist collaborated with the local school districts to conduct an assessment of all retail stores in Columbia County. The purpose of the assessment is to learn how tobacco, alcohol, and lottery products are placed and advertised in retail stores.

Why involve students:

Tobacco, alcohol, and lottery are heavily promoted in retail stores. These industries spend billions each year promoting products through store advertisements, price discounts, and other product promotions. The industries target youth and specific population groups and contribute to the disproportionate burden. It is imperative to educate youth on how they are directly impacted through advertising.

Timeline:

- August/September 2013: TPEP Coordinator & Prevention Specialist planning assessment and preparing documents. Worked with HPCDP data team to create evaluation tools. Educating school Councilors, Principals, and Superintendents about the project.
- Retail Assessment: October 2013 – January 2014
- Data evaluation: February 2014 – ongoing
- Education: April 2013 – ongoing

Actual Assessment Process:

TPEP Coordinator & Prevention Specialist worked with the school Councilors to identify a student group willing to participate and a date to conduct the assessment. Letters were sent to each of the retailers to let them know about the project and see if they had any questions.

The day of the assessment the high school students received one hour training on how to conduct the assessment. Following the training the TPEP Coordinator and Prevention Specialist accompanied the students to each of the retailers in the community. The first assessment took the longest averaging 20 minutes. As the students became more comfortable with the assessment the average time shortened to 15 minutes a store. At each of the stores either the Prevention or TPEP Coordinator entered first to confirm the store received their letter and if it was okay for the students to come in and complete the assessment.

The students completed a pre and post evaluation form. The students were also asked the following upon returning from the assessment:

- Was there anything surprising?
- How could this information be used?

Successes / Challenges / Improvements:

Success:

- Working with a number of students to complete the Tobacco Retail Assessment.
- Using the Ipads for the assessment and taking pictures
- The students identified great ideas for moving forward and are interested in supporting the issue.
- The follow up questions: what was surprising to students in regards to advertising and product placement?
- Sending letters to retailer's letting them know about the project. Several of the stores were expecting us and were nice about the project.
- Working with the Prevention Specialist to coordinate efforts and completing the assessment.

Challenges:

- Not communicating to the data team. TPEP staff had multiple students complete the assessment for the same store and not all the students entered in the same information.
 - Following each store the TPEP staff should have checked in with the students to make sure they all had the same responses.
- Timeline
 - Having each of the community assessments spread out over several months.
 - It created some challenges with the Ipads. It would have been better to schedule all the assessment over one month at the most.

Improvement:

- Clear communication to community partners for example school faculty.
- Factsheet/elevator speech done earlier in the process. The fact sheet was not created until a quarter of the way through the project.

Next Steps:

The goal is to continue to work with the HPCDP data team on presentations and visual handouts for an outreach campaign. TPEP staff is going to work with the Public Health Administrator to make connections with County and City officials. TPEP staff will present findings and seek out input regarding potential enforce policy change / implementation for the 2015-16 fiscal year. TPEP staff plans to also present findings to different community groups and organizations.