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TOBACCO MARKETING UPDATE

Reducing Youth Exposure to Tobacco Advertising and Promotion

Saint Paul votes to restrict sale of flavored tobacco, raise price of cigars



Advocates celebrate vote to restrict flavored tobacco in Saint Paul.

By **CHRIS TURNER**

The Saint Paul City Council showed strong leadership in protecting the health and well-being of its residents on Jan. 6.

The City Council voted unanimously to restrict the sale of flavored tobacco products to adult-only tobacco stores and increase the minimum price for single cigars to \$2.60 each. All cigars sold in packages of four or less must be priced at \$2.60 each, while cigars packaged at four or more must be at least \$10.40.

“It’s a big deal that we’re going to make it harder for youth to access these products,” council president Russ Stark said.

Saint Paul joins Minneapolis in restricting the sale of flavored tobacco products. Other places to restrict flavored tobacco sales include Providence, R.I., and New York City. Saint Paul was one of the first cities in the state to set a minimum price for cigars, but the ordinance will raise the price to \$2.60 to match surrounding cities.

“I think this is a good ordinance that sends a strong message to the tobacco industry,” said Councilmember Dai Thao, one of five co-

sponsors of the ordinance. “We can’t trade the health of future generations for the tobacco industry’s profit.”

The room turned green as Councilmember Amy Brendmoen, who first introduced the ordinance, had supporters of the ordinance stand up. Most of the advocates sported a green shirt that said, “The tobacco industry targets youth with flavored tobacco ... but there’s nothing sweet about tobacco.”

The tobacco industry has a long history of targeting young people with cheap and flavored tobacco. Alicia Leizinger, from the Ramsey Tobacco Coalition, said she is thrilled Saint Paul is taking action to stop that.

“Saint Paul has once again proven itself to be a leader willing to stand up to the tobacco industry’s blatant attempts at hooking kids with candy flavored tobacco,” Leizinger said. “I’m proud of the young people who brought this issue to the attention of the City Council and urged them to take action to protect Saint Paul’s youth.”

Council newcomer Jane Prince, who was sworn in the day before, also voiced her support. She pointed out how naysayers said

the bar and restaurant industry would go under if smoking were banned in those places.

“But we’re thriving,” Prince said. “I’m supportive of this and appreciative of the young people who worked on this. The young man (Traielle Godfrey) who testified said it best. Candy-flavored tobacco products don’t have a place where children can enter.”

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Half of Minnesotans enjoy clean air

By CHRIS FARMER-LIES

The city of Duluth was the first in the state to adopt a clean indoor air ordinance that includes electronic cigarettes in September 2013. As of today, almost half of all Minnesotans live in a city or county with a comprehensive clean indoor air ordinance, according to ClearWay Minnesota. This includes Hennepin and Ramsey counties, the two most populous counties in Minnesota. Carver County, Waconia, Steele County, Moorhead, and Wilkin County have all adopted comprehensive clean indoor air ordinances in the last few weeks.

A February 2014 poll by ClearWay and Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Minnesota found that 79 percent of Minnesotans support including electronic cigarettes in the state Clean Indoor Air Act. However, repeated proposals at the legislature have been unsuccessful.

2013 tobacco tax keeps on giving

By CHRIS FARMER-LIES

Minnesota's tobacco tax went up by 10 cents and the sales taxes on cigarettes went up by two cents on Jan. 1, 2016. In 2013, the legislature increased the cigarette tax by \$1.60, and set in place an automatic inflator that increases the tobacco tax every year in line with inflation. At \$3 (plus \$0.54 in sales tax), Minnesota now has the seventh-highest cigarette tax. Each pack also has a \$1.01 federal tax per pack.

The tax increase has proven to be extremely effective at reducing smoking, especially among price-sensitive youth. The 2014 Minnesota Youth Tobacco Survey found that past 30-day use of cigarettes among high school students went from 18.1 percent in 2011 to 10.6 percent, the largest drop in the history of the survey. Adult smokers experienced a less drastic decrease, from 16.1 percent in 2010 to 14.4 percent in 2014, according to the Minnesota Adult Tobacco Survey. A majority of adult smokers who quit in this time period cited the increased price as a motivation to quit smoking.

A proposal to remove the automatic inflator was passed through the legislature in 2014 by Rep. Greg Davids (R) District 28B and Sen. Lyle Koenen (DFL) District 17. However, because the legislature did not pass an omnibus tax bill, the automatic inflator was kept in place. With intense pressure by the tobacco and convenience store industries, it is expected the measure will be debated during the 2016 legislative session.

Swisher Sweets promotes heavily on social media

By BETSY BROCK

Tobacco companies like Marlboro, Camel, and Skoal typically limit their web-marketing to their age-restricted websites and do not engage in social media marketing. On the contrary, the Swisher Sweets cigar brand focuses heavily on promotion through social media marketing. Swisher uses Instagram (@swishersweets), Twitter (@swishersweets), YouTube, and Facebook to promote their products. They do this by using popular or trending hashtags (e.g. #onfleck) that link their posts to general feeds that aren't age restricted.

Recently, the company launched the "Swisher Sweets Artist Project" promotion. Through this promotion, Swisher is using social media to highlight up-and-coming bands that appeal to young people. These bands are also promoted through pop-up concerts in convenience stores called "Convenience Store Sessions." Videos of these sessions are posted on the company's YouTube page. In turn, the selected bands promote Swisher on their band social media pages. Swisher sponsored bands are young and hip. Bands include: Oliver the Kid, Fantastic Negro, FMLYBND, Madyx, Fire In The Hamptons, and Drop City Yacht Club. These bands typically appeal to the 14-24 year old crowd. This type of promotion clearly helps the company reach youth consumers. Currently, Swishers are one of the top three cigar brands most popular with youth.



Instagram post from "Swisher Sweet Artist Project" participant Madyx. In this post, Madyx tags the #swishersweeties. Swisher Sweeties are brand ambassadors for the cigar company.