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NEW PRODUCTS INCREASE IMPORTANCE OF PREVENTING YOUTH ACCESS TO TOBACCO

Tobacco control programs have dealt powerful blows to the U.S. tobacco industry in recent months and years, including smoke-free workplace laws in 27 states, a 62 cent federal tobacco tax that went into effect in March, and FDA regulation of tobacco industry practices. Though the tide may be turning in the battle against smoking, advocates caution that the tobacco companies won't go down without a fight.

"They're investing heavily in alternative smokeless tobacco products in order to respond to increasing regulations and smoke-free air laws," said Lee Gill RN, PHN, Lafayette County Health Department. "These products are marketed as ways to get around the laws."

Examples of these alternative products include snuff, chewing tobacco, and "Snus", which are spit-less tobacco pouches that users place under their upper lip. The tobacco industry promotes smokeless tobacco products as less dangerous alternatives to smoking and markets products in kid-friendly flavors like Berry Blend, Mint, and Cherry. Camel advertising also reminds users that Snus can be used "Anytime, Anywhere" regardless of whether or not smoke-free laws are in place. Snus originated in Sweden, but has become increasingly popular in the U.S., and has started appearing in Wisconsin stores.

"No matter what the industry tries to tell you, smokeless tobacco products aren't a safe alternative to cigarettes," said Lee Gill. "They can cause mouth and pancreatic cancer, as well as receding gums, bone loss around the roots of teeth, and teeth loss."

With these new products on the racks, health professionals say it's more important than ever to prevent tobacco sales to minors.

"Bright packaging, candy flavors, and the illusion of a safer product may make these products more appealing to teens," said Lee Gill. "Retailers help their business and their community by checking IDs for all tobacco purchases, including cigarettes and smokeless tobacco."

Selling tobacco products to minors can have serious consequences for retailers. Wisconsin State Statute 134.66 prohibits the sale of tobacco products to anyone under the age of 18 and also requires training for staff that sell tobacco products. Retailers who sell to minors can receive fines as high as \$500 for selling to minors and licenses can be suspended up to 30 days if they've had a prior violation in the previous year. Both retailers and any employees who make illegal sales are subject to fines.

Free tobacco sales training and certification is available for retailers at www.smokecheck.org, an online test developed by the Wisconsin Wins program. Wisconsin Wins is a program of the Wisconsin Tobacco Prevention and Control Program, and provides training, media and community outreach, and education to help retailers avoid hefty fines.