



Customers Speak Out!

Protect our Children and Make Tobacco Advertising and Tobacco Product Placement Less Visible in Large Grocery Stores

On Thursday, November 15th, the 31st Great American Smokeout, a coalition of public health advocates gathered in Latham, NY to make a public request of owners of large grocery store chains to meet with them and discuss ways to reduce and rearrange tobacco advertisements and tobacco products in their stores.

Janine Stuchin, Project Manager of the Southern Adirondack Tobacco Free Coalition explained “Historically, the Great American Smokeout assisted smokers in their attempts to stop smoking, this year we are shifting attention to what is attracting individuals, most often children, to begin smoking in the first place. Let’s address the issue of smoking where it starts – with advertising.”

Over the past five months, more than 3,000 Capital District grocery store customers have added their voices to those of community advocates by signing postcards and petitions asking these stores to make tobacco advertising and tobacco products less visible as a way to decrease the attractiveness of smoking to young people and protect them from the harmful and often fatal effects of tobacco use. Across New York State more than 5,000 adults signed postcards and petitions urging retail stores to reduce, rearrange, or eliminate tobacco advertising.

In addition, a telephone survey of Capital District residents during the summer of 2007 showed that a majority would like to see grocery stores move tobacco displays and sales to the customer service desk. Grocery chains in Western NY already use this practice as a way to reduce youth exposure to tobacco advertising. Tobacco products can also be made less visible by making plastic display stations often located at the front of stores opaque instead of clear.

“The community has demonstrated their concern about the visibility of tobacco products and tobacco advertising to young people. Together, we are now asking the stores where children regularly accompany their parents to do something about it,” explains Judy Rightmyer, Director of the Capital District Tobacco-Free Coalition.

To increase the public's awareness of the impact of tobacco advertising on youth tobacco use, the Tobacco-Free Coalitions in the capital region are currently conducting a media campaign on network television. The 30-second ad features Rick Stoddard who lost his wife to tobacco use at the age of 42. Rick speaks out against the steady barrage of tobacco ads located in stores and urges parents to take action and ask for their removal.

Public health advocates described the especially powerful negative impact of tobacco advertising on children and teens. "Numerous studies have linked tobacco industry marketing practices to an increased likelihood that adolescents will begin to smoke," said Lauren Rowland, Saratoga County Reality Check Coordinator. "It is not just a hunch that these ads are influencing youth, it is well-documented."

Health advocates and the several thousand adults in the capital region who signed the postcards and petitions are asking the area's large grocery stores to set policy to protect the health of children. "Adult smokers can continue to obtain their tobacco products. We are simply asking that the grocery stores no longer be complicit in helping the tobacco industry cultivate yet another generation of smokers," stated Judy Rightmyer.

###

Judy Rightmyer, Project Director – 810-5316