



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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ATTENTION: NEWS DIRECTORS/ASSIGNMENT EDITORS/Writers/REPORTERS

“Don’t Let Our Kids’ Summer Go Up in Smoke!”

TOBACCO SALES ENFORCEMENT HEATS UP WITH SUMMITS ACROSS N.C.

New Statistics Create Urgency

Raleigh, NC – Summits on teen tobacco enforcement will convene around the state in June, which Alcohol Law Enforcement (ALE) and the NC Health & Wellness Trust Fund (HWTF) encourage everyone to think of as Tobacco-Enforcement Awareness Month. Armed with the rallying cry of, "Don't let our kids' summer go up in smoke!," the regional summits will bring together ALE and local law enforcement agents, community agencies, retail owners, managers, and grocery store and convenience store clerks to review tobacco regulation policies and plot strategies for tighter enforcement.

Retail sales of tobacco to minors remain a significant and, in the long run, deadly problem. Preliminary results from the 2003 NC Youth Tobacco Survey (NC YTS) indicate that despite the state's legal prohibition on the sale of tobacco to minors, one in five high school smokers gets his/her cigarettes from stores. While many other measurements of teen tobacco use have declined (see Fast Facts on page 2), the retail statistic remains at its 2001 level.

According to the Centers for Disease Control, reducing tobacco sales to minors is one way to prevent youth tobacco use. Tobacco use has long been called a "gateway drug" because it often is the first substance young people use before experimenting with alcohol and illicit drugs. During the summer, many teens are out of school, do not receive tobacco prevention messages to the degree they do when school is in and have less access to prevention/cessation resources.

Lt. Gov. Beverly Perdue, who chairs the HWTF, has said, "The dangers of tobacco use are impossible to ignore. We need to get tobacco products away from our children and out of our schools." In March, Lt. Gov. Perdue presented the first in a series of NC Health & Wellness' Tobacco Enforcement Excellence Awards to honor the thousands of retail clerks who *do* enforce tobacco sales age limits.

Summits will convene from **9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m.** in **Raleigh, Winston-Salem, Charlotte, Asheville** and **Greenville**. To register, please call Carol Morris at 919-715-1415. There is no registration fee and the summits are open to the public. See next page for exact sites and dates.

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SUMMIT DATES/LOCATIONS:

- June 3 – NC State University Club, 4200 Hillsborough Street, Raleigh
- June 8 – The Hawthorne Inn & Conference Center, 420 High Street, Winston-Salem
- June 15 – Hope Haven Conference Center, 3815 North Tryon Street, Charlotte
- June 22 – Mountain Area Health Education Center, 501 Biltmore Avenue, Asheville
- June 29 – Agricultural Extension Building, 403 Government Circle, Greenville

SUMMIT HIGHLIGHTS:

- State-level progress and successes in reducing youth tobacco access and availability.
- Review of state and federal laws governing the sale of tobacco products to minors.
- Strategies involving retailer education and training, public education/awareness, recognition of events, media and law enforcement activities.
- Provide an opportunity for participants to share their perspectives and experiences in reducing youth access to tobacco products.

SPONSORS:

- NC Health & Wellness Trust Fund
- NC Alcohol Law Enforcement
- NC Department of Health and Human Services' Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services

FAST FACTS ABOUT THE 2003 YOUTH TOBACCO SURVEY:

The 2003 NC Youth Tobacco Survey (NC YTS) is conducted every other year by the NC Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch (NC TPCB). Preliminary results show that across North Carolina current cigarette use among middle school students (grades 6-8) has dropped 38% since 1999, from 15.0% (1999) to 11.3% (2001), and finally to 9.3% (2003) in the most recent survey. "Unfortunately, high school current cigarette use was 27.3% in the 2003 survey, which is not significantly lower than 2001 or 1999," said Sally Herndon Malek, MPH, head of the NC TPCB.

ABOUT ALE

The Alcohol Law Enforcement Division's Tobacco Education and Enforcement program is conducted in partnership with the Division of Mental Health, Developmental Disabilities and Substance Abuse Services and the NC Health & Wellness Trust Fund. It is also a cooperative effort among community agencies, local law enforcement agencies, merchants, parents and teens. ALE, a division of the Department of Crime Control and Public Safety, has 76 agents across North Carolina who enforce alcohol and tobacco laws.

ABOUT THE NC HEALTH & WELLNESS TRUST FUND:

The NC Health & Wellness Trust Fund makes North Carolina stronger, both physically and economically, by funding programs that promote preventive health. Created by the General Assembly in 2000 to allocate a portion of North Carolina's share of the national tobacco settlement, HWTF has invested \$55 million to support preventive health initiatives and \$78 million to fund a prescription drug assistance program. For more information, please visit www.hwtfc.org.

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