

Lake of the Woods County counters tobacco industry advertising strategies to save youth lives

Nearly one in five Minnesota high school students use tobacco, according to the 2014 Minnesota Youth Tobacco Survey. More than 102,100 Minnesota youth are projected to die from smoking alone, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). The Lake of the Woods Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP) is working to reduce youth tobacco use and exposure by countering industry advertising and marketing strategies.

Tobacco use is still the leading cause of preventable death and disease in Minnesota, and industry marketing strategies still target youth by placing cigarette advertisements at child-eye level or offering candy-like flavors in tobacco products, like grape or bubble gum. These strategies are often referred to as point-of-sale (POS) strategies.

National data on smoking use by teens also raises concerns. The CDC notes that if the current rate of smoking persists, one in every 13 youth ages 17 years or younger are predicted to die prematurely from a smoking-related illness.

In March 2016, Lake of the Woods SHIP staff received the American Lung Association's Point of Sale training, which detailed how the commercial tobacco industry influences youth and adult tobacco use behaviors through POS marketing strategies. It also outlined POS policy options. "We were trained on conducting tobacco audits in our area to help learn which stores or bars are selling tobacco products and what marketing strategies they are using," said Melody Otto, Lake of the Woods SHIP staff.

Beltrami and Clearwater counties conducted POS audits in 2014. Results helped gain support for policy change, such as increased tobacco licensing costs for tobacco retailers. "We plan to share the information across the county to demonstrate how POS impacts youth and adult tobacco behavior," she added. The training included representation from the County Sheriff Department, District Attorney, Public Health, the Prevention Coalition and Social Services.



Point of Sale training included representatives from law enforcement, District Attorney, public health, Prevention Coalition and Social Services..

The group continues planning for decrease in tobacco sales and use

In conjunction with POS training, Lake of the Woods SHIP has also been working with landlords and property managers on implementing a "no tobacco use" policy for rental properties throughout the county. With help from American Lung Association, Otto mailed 68 post cards earlier this year to Beltrami, Clearwater, Hubbard and Lake of the Woods counties inviting landlords and property managers to adopt a smoke-free policy in 2016. Otto is also planning a "lunch and learn" session later this year.

"Our goal is to decrease the amount of tobacco use in the county; especially among youth. We want to raise awareness about how industry marketing practices impact youth and adult tobacco use behavior and learn how data can be used to support policy and community change efforts," said Otto. Lake of the Woods SHIP will conduct tobacco audits in summer 2016 and will share results later this year. For more information on Lake of the Woods SHIP, please visit www.ncchb.org.