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**TOBACCO RETAIL LICENSING IN SIERRA COUNTY  
FINAL EVALUATION REPORT 2014-2017**

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*Evaluation Component 1-E-10*

**CTCP Contract Number: 13-46  
Contract Period: 7/1/14 – 6/30/17**

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**Report Submitted:** June 30, 2017

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Made possible by funds received from the Tobacco Tax Health Protection Act of 1988 – Proposition 99, through the California Department of Public Health, California Tobacco Control Program (CTCP) Contract #13-46, Contract Term: 07/01/14 – 06/30/17.

Recommended citation: Haun, S. (2017). *Tobacco Retail Licensing in Sierra County Final Evaluation Report 2014-2017*. California: Sierra County Human Services Tobacco Use Reduction Program.

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## TOBACCO RETAIL LICENSING IN SIERRA COUNTY FINAL EVALUATION REPORT 2014-2017

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### ABSTRACT

Illegal tobacco sales rates to minors in Sierra County were high and erratic—at 17% in 2010, 40% in 2011, 57% in 2012, then 0% in 2013—compared to the state rate of 6-9%, indicating a serious problem. In an effort to limit youth access and exposure to tobacco products, the Sierra County Tobacco Use Reduction Program (SCTURP) worked to get the county's two jurisdictions (the City of Loyalton and the County of Sierra) to adopt and implement a Tobacco Retail Licensing (TRL) policy by June 30, 2017 that earmarked a portion of the license fee for enforcement activities. The objective was not met.

The project had been working on a licensing objective since 2010 but, in a rural county where policymakers were reluctant to impose restrictions on small businesses, it was difficult to gain much traction. In 2014-2017, besides doing community education and outreach, engaging youth, conducting Youth Tobacco Purchase Surveys (YTPS) and educating retailers regarding a TRL, the county also conducted data collection and media activities as part of the statewide Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community campaign. Store observations, public opinion surveys, key informant interviews and media activity records documented the prevalence of unhealthy products being sold, public support for related policies, lawmakers' views on policy options, and the extent of media coverage on the issue. Since baseline observations in 2013, the number of stores selling electronic smoking devices in the county's five tobacco retailers decreased from 17% to 0%. All (100%) of tobacco retailers sell cigarettes, chew, cigarillos, menthol cigarettes and flavored products. Public support for a TRL policy was high (68%), as was support for preventing stores near schools from selling tobacco (75%) and amending current laws that prohibit use of e-cigarettes in places where smoking is already prohibited (59%).

Despite public support for TRL, the project was hampered by a small retailer population, limited coalition involvement, lack of support from the newly elected Sheriff, a lack of public health leadership due to a position vacancy, limited access to youth who were not known by the tobacco retailers, and a conservative political climate.

### AIM AND OUTCOME

In order to limit youth access to tobacco and electronic smoking device products, the Sierra County Tobacco Use Reduction Program set the following objective:

*By June 30, 2017, the unincorporated communities of Sierra County and the incorporated City of Loyalton will adopt a Tobacco Retail Licensing (TRL) policy that includes sufficient enforcement/administration fees and annual compliance checks. This is a primary objective addressing Communities of Excellence indicator 3.2.1.*

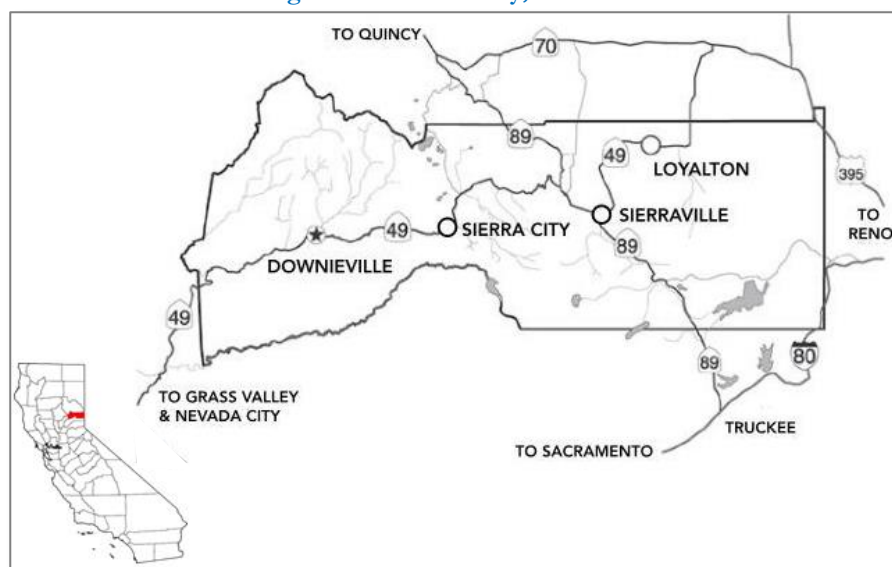
By the end of the 2014-2017 scope of work period, the objective was not met. To date, neither of the county's two jurisdictions has adopted a tobacco retail licensing policy.

## BACKGROUND

Sierra County is a rural county of 3,240 people (U.S. Census 2010), making it the second-least populous county in California. Located in the Sierra Nevada, northeast of Sacramento, the population is spread over 2,490 square miles in one incorporated city in the county (Loyalton, with a population of 769), as well as an unincorporated area home to approximately 2,471 people. The population is a mix of 88% non-Hispanic Whites, 8% Hispanics, 1% Native Americans, 1% Asians, and 2% two or more races. The median household income is \$42,833 and 13.8% of the population lives below the poverty line (U.S. Census 2011), the same as the state (13.7%). Almost one-fifth (17%) of the population is under 18 years of age.

Typical of rural areas, the overall smoking rate in Sierra County is 20.5%, higher than the state average of 12.7% (California Health Interview Survey, 2012-2014). Use rates among minors is 10.0%, slightly lower than the state rate of 10.5% (California Student Tobacco Survey, 2012). However, given that over 550 minors in the county are potentially at risk, curbing the tobacco use and uptake among that burgeoning population is a priority, especially for parents.

Figure 1. Sierra County, California



The Retail Environment is the tobacco industry's main point of entry into local communities, and where the bulk of its advertising and promotional budgets are spent (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2012). Tobacco retail stores in rural areas tend to have the lowest tobacco prices and the highest amount of tobacco promotions and ads. Tobacco advertising and promotions have an even greater effect on youth than peer pressure, and exposure increases the likelihood that youth will start to smoke.

Within Sierra County there are six retailers (California Board of Equalization, 2012), each of which promotes, advertises and sells tobacco products. Illegal sales of tobacco products to minors have been an issue for several years throughout the county. Since 2010, the Sierra County Tobacco Use Reduction Program (SCTURP) has conducted numerous Youth Tobacco Purchase Surveys (YTTPS), which have documented a high rate of tobacco sales to minors. Overall, the county buy rate varied considerably among the six tobacco retailers during the 2010-2013 scope of work period; from 17% in 2010, to 40% in 2011, to 57% in 2012, then 0% in 2013, compared to an average of 6-9% at the state level (Schemenauer, C. 2014). This widely fluctuating illegal sales rate was an indication of a problem.

Many cities throughout California have been working to reduce youth access to tobacco products by adopting tobacco retail licenses. The license requires retailers to pay an annual fee which is then typically used to fund enforcement of tobacco laws, including prohibiting tobacco sales to minors, and retailer education programs. With a tobacco retail license policy in place, if a retailer is convicted of selling tobacco to underage youth, the license can be suspended or revoked. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (2010), “applying penalties to business owners, who generally set hiring, training, supervising, and selling policies, is considered essential to preventing the sale of tobacco to minors.” Since the sale of tobacco products is quite lucrative for many retailers, the potential loss of these sales provides an incentive to follow applicable laws.

Since 2010, SCTURP has been informing and educating decision makers and community members regarding the need for local jurisdictions to adopt tobacco retail licensing policies that earmark a portion of the license fee for enforcement. However, to date, policymakers have been hesitant to pass a policy that would impose fees on small business for fear of hurting the local economy and too much government regulation. By the end of the 2013-2014 contract period, although progress was made in collecting local data on illegal sales and educating policy makers, finding allies on the city council or the county board of supervisors that were sympathetic to the issue had not happened. By June 2014, no tobacco-related policies have been passed in either of the two jurisdictions in the county.

However, at the conclusion of the 2013-2014 contract period, the final evaluation report findings indicated that the previous four years (2010, 2011, 2012 and 2013) showed a buy rate ranging from 17% to 57% to 0%, which indicated that there was a problem and that the 0% illegal sales rate in 2013 may have been a fluke. For that reason, more education was needed in regards to the effectiveness of TRL to build support. These findings were factored into SCTURP’s Communities of Excellence (CX) Needs Assessment process to determine priorities for the 2014-2017 workplan. Six members of the community—including project staff, adult coalition members, and partners representing health agencies, the schools, and youth groups—took part in the process. Of the 25 indicators and assets assessed, tobacco retail licensing was one of the most highly rated. There was also support from the County Sheriff. Given the need to curb the illegal sales rate to minors and the investment the County had already made toward this effort, SCTURP opted to continue its pursuit of policies addressing tobacco retail licensing for the 2014-2017 workplan.

## EVALUATION METHODS AND DESIGN

The evaluation plan provided formative data to inform intervention activities and strategies along the way, as well as to confirm adoption of a policy that requires all tobacco retailers to have a license to sell tobacco. Specifically, it used a non-experimental design (there were no control groups), and only process data were collected, as Table 1 illustrates.

Achievement of the objective – the adoption of a tobacco retail licensing policy – would have been measured using a Youth Tobacco Purchase Survey in year three of the project, indicating the rate of illegal sales to minors in comparison to pre-policy adoption sales rates. However, a policy was not adopted.

Process data were collected from five evaluation activities. A Youth Tobacco Purchase/STAKE Act Signage Survey in years one and three was used to indicate the illegal sales rate among tobacco retail stores, as well as measure compliance with STAKE Act signage requirements. Annual surveys were planned, but didn't happen in year two because youth participants were not available. A Store Observation Survey in year two, and a Public Intercept Survey, Key Informant Interviews, and a Media Activity Record in year three were part of the Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community (HSHC) statewide data collection effort.

Over the three-year project, four data collection trainings were provided with 15 adult and 12 youth surveyors. The purpose of three of the trainings was to prepare youth and adult chaperones for the Youth Tobacco Purchase and STAKE Act surveys. A fourth data collection training was conducted with adult and youth surveyors to prepare for the HSHC store observation survey. The data collection trainings were provided to ensure the validity and reliability of the data. The Project Director personally collected the Public Intercept Survey data and was trained by the Tobacco Control Evaluation Center (TCEC) at a regional training event.

These evaluation activities provided, respectively, information on the illegal sales to minors, compliance with STAKE Act signage requirements, availability of tobacco products in stores, public and policymaker opinions on various tobacco control issues, as well as the type and amount of media coverage of the statewide press event and related tobacco topics. Quantitative data were analyzed by calculating frequencies and percentages, and interviews were summarized and analyzed for commonalities and differences. For more information on each of these evaluation activities, see Table 1.

**Limitations.** The major limitations of this design are: 1) not having a comparison group to provide another perspective in assessing the intervention's strengths and weaknesses; and 2) the convenience public intercept survey may have represented the views of those who chose to participate rather than the entire county population.

**Table 1: Key Outcome and Process Evaluation Activities**

Evaluation Activity	Purpose	Sample	Instrument Source	Analysis Method	Timing /Waves
<b>Process</b>					
<b>Youth Tobacco Purchase/STAKE Act Survey</b>	Measure the rate of illegal sales of tobacco products to minors, and signage	Census of 6 tobacco retailers	Strategic Tobacco Retail Effort (S.T.O.R.E.)	Descriptive statistics	Years 1 & 3 2 Waves
<b>Statewide HSHC Store Observation Survey</b>	Measure the availability of various tobacco products and marketing	Sample of 3 (of 5) retailers <sup>1</sup>	Stanford University	Descriptive statistics	Year 2 1 Wave

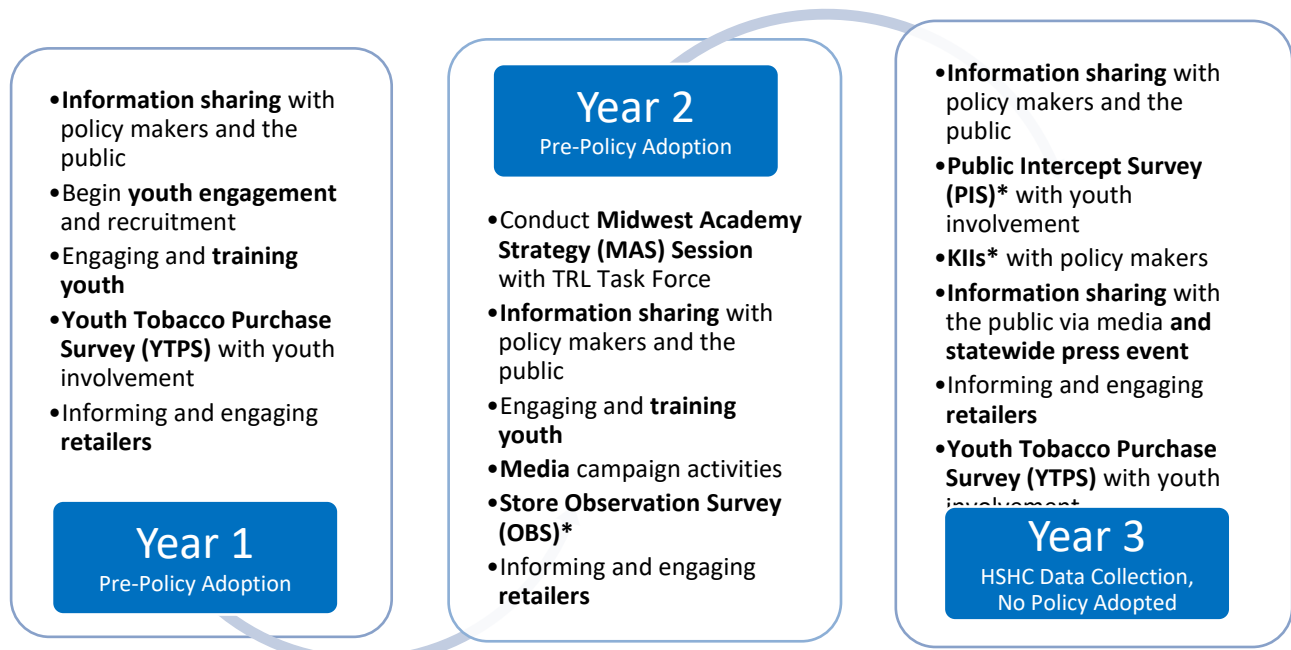
<sup>1</sup> There were six retailers at the start of the project period. One retailer stopped selling tobacco.

Evaluation Activity	Purpose	Sample	Instrument Source	Analysis Method	Timing /Waves
Statewide HSHC Public Intercept Survey	Measure public opinion on policy issues in the retail environment	Convenience sample of 102 Sierra County residents	TCEC	Descriptive statistics	Year 3 1 Wave
Statewide HSHC Key Informant Interviews with county supervisors, city council and key community stakeholders	Measure the level of support and opposition to a variety of tobacco control issues, including TRL	Purposive sample of 12 key leaders	TCEC	Descriptive statistics and content analysis	Year 3 1 Wave
Statewide HSHC Media Activity Record	Measure the level of support or opposition, as well as reach	Census sample of 4 print and online media outlets	TCEC	Descriptive statistics and content analysis	Year 3 1 Wave

## IMPLEMENTATION AND RESULTS

The sequence of intervention and evaluation activities was designed so that early actions laid the foundation for progress forward, informing the timing, messaging and strategies of activities that followed. Figure 2 provides an overview of the project activity timeline, including key events, in chronological order.

Figure 2: Key Intervention and Evaluation Activities in Chronological Order



\*Evaluation activity that was part of a statewide data collection effort coordinated by the California Tobacco Control Program among all Local Lead Agencies in California.



### *Outreach, recruitment and engagement*

At the start of the three-year scope of work, project staff recruited youth and adults interested in addressing illegal sales to minors through tobacco retail licensing (under SCTURP's Objective #4, Adult and Youth Engagement). Adults were recruited during one-hour educational presentations to health and human services partners, county agencies and community-based partner organizations, and one-on-one. A total of 12 adults were recruited during the three-year project; some were from the Sierra County Coordinating Committee, others were from the county office of emergency services, public health, the volunteer fire department, youth advisors from Friday Night Live (FNL) and Club Live, and the general public.

To recruit youth, project staff contacted FNL and Club Live in Downieville and Loyalton, respectively. Club Live is for 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> graders, ages 11 to 12. FNL includes youth 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades, ages 13 to 18. One-hour presentations were made on three different occasions to recruit youth by sharing information on illegal sales to minors, the prevalence of e-cigarettes and the need for tobacco retail licensing. As a result, 12 youth were recruited, ages 11 to 18, during the project period. Project staff provided a series of trainings and activities over the three-year workplan.

Spokesperson training was provided for the adults and youth under SCTURP's Objective #4, Adult and Youth Engagement. The one-hour training, which was conducted annually, covered public speaking techniques and talking points. In a separate training, youth were also instructed how to write newsletter articles.

Over the three-year project, the *adults* made presentations to community groups, developed electronic smoking device fact sheets, and coordinated youth survey teams for the Public Intercept Survey. The *youth* participated in data collection for the Public Intercept Survey and wrote three articles for the local paper. The Public Intercept Survey is discussed more below under *Public opinion*.

### *Adult involvement*

In May 2015, three coalition members and one community volunteer, which formed the TRL Task Force that was a subcommittee of the larger tobacco coalition, participated in a strategy session to think through the process necessary to get a TRL adopted in the City of Loyalton and in the unincorporated areas of the county. Law enforcement, although not part of the TRL Task Force, participated in the strategy session. Surprisingly, there was very adamant pushback from one of the Task Force members regarding tobacco retail licensing (the community member) because they did not want to ask business owners to pay any kind of fee. Although that person resigned, the remaining Task Force members agreed that continuing to do community education and gathering local data through store observation surveys, STAKE Act signage compliance and illegal sales to underage youth were needed to convince policy makers in the county's conservative political climate. Given that the illegal sales rate was 0% in 2013 (even though the project thought this was a fluke), more data was needed to make a strong case for the need for regulation through tobacco retail licensing to keep tobacco out of the hands of local youth.



### *Youth involvement*

Involving youth in data collection efforts and reporting can be crucial in policy campaigns. For that reason, SCTURP prepared to train youth in the first of several data collection activities, the Youth Tobacco Purchase Survey.

Important to note is that Sierra County is a small, sparsely populated county and everyone knows everyone else. For that reason, it was a challenge to recruit youth that the local retailers did not know. The Project Director attempted to “trade” youth with a neighboring county. However, trying to work out the logistics and transportation issues proved too difficult. Such an approach was abandoned since it was delaying the training, not to mention the observation itself. Moreover, due to the unforeseen need to create an MOU with Friday Night Live as well as staffing changes for the two clubs, there was a delay in conducting the training from spring 2015 to summer 2015.

In summer 2015, three youth and two adult chaperones participated in a four-hour data collection training. The instrument and protocol were developed by the Strategic Tobacco Retail Effort (S.T.O.R.E.) Campaign. During the training, participants practiced conducting the YTPS, simulating practice in the field. Participants were assessed for accuracy and role-playing was performed until sufficient inter-rater reliability was achieved. For the YTPS findings, see *Youth access* below.

Another training for data collection for the YTPS was conducted in summer 2016, year two of the project; during which five youth participated. However, during that time the age of sale for tobacco products was raised to 21 and SCTURP was unable to recruit youth to participate. In year three, two youth/young adults were recruited for the second and last YTPS for the workplan. One youth had participated in the 2015 survey and, therefore, required little training. See *Youth access* below for the YTPS results.

SCTURP also invited the recruited youth to a four-hour data collector training to learn how to do the store observations, which included learning about various tobacco products, for the HSHC initiative. The instrument and protocol were provided by Stanford University as part of the statewide data collection effort. A total of three youth and two adults participated in the training, which was also conducted in the summer of 2016. The Project Director conducted the training and used a tobacco products display and Kahoot! quizzes for hands-on practice. It was not possible to do field practice in actual stores because the training was conducted in one of the targeted cities and traveling to another city or a neighboring county with the youth participants was not practical. During the training for the store observations as well as the public intercept survey (discussed below), participants were assessed for accuracy so that the trainer could correct common mistakes until sufficient inter-rater reliability was achieved. The adult participants had a more difficult time using smart phones and tablets than the youth, so additional practice on these devices was provided.

In the fall/winter of 2016, SCTURP involved youth from FNL and Club Live in a two-hour data collection training to learn how to implement the public intercept surveys for the HSHC initiative. The instrument and protocol were provided by TCEC as part of the statewide data collection effort. A total of four youth and two adult chaperones participated. The training, provided by the Project Director, included hands-on practice and role-playing.

### *Community support*

In year one of the project, presentations were made to key community groups in the county regarding illegal sales to minors, including the Sierra County Child Care Council, First 5 Sierra and the Sierra County Health Coordinating Committee. Overall, 13 Letters of Endorsement were collected from key community groups and/or professionals and key leaders in the community to eliminate illegal tobacco sales to minors. These groups/individuals were: First 5 Sierra, Sierra Nevada Children's Services, Loyalton Volunteer Fire Department, Downieville Emergency Medical Services Supervisor, Sierra County Public Health Nurse, Sierra County Prevention Coalition Chair, Sierra County Behavioral Health Certified Addiction Treatment Counselor, Sierra County Community Outreach Coordinator, Community and Coalition Member, Sierra County Public Health Officer, Sierra County Office of Emergency Services, Sierra County Women Infants and Children Coordinator, and Sierra County Plant Manager. Important to note, in February 2016, the American Lung Association distributed its "grades" related to tobacco policy for California counties – Sierra County received an "F" grade. The report card was leveraged under SCTURP's Objective #3, Tobacco Free Facilities and may have facilitated endorsements from these key community organizations as a result.

The letters of endorsement were intended to be included in educational kits to policymakers. However, since a presentation has not been made to the Board of Supervisors or the Loyalton City Council, these materials have not yet been distributed.

### *Law enforcement*

From the start, SCTURP knew that law enforcement support was needed. During the CX process, the Sheriff at the time participated and was on board with the idea of licensing tobacco retailers to address Penal Code 308 violations. However, a new County Sheriff was elected in November 2015, and YTPS was not among his priorities. Consequently, law enforcement has not been involved since then. Nonetheless, SCTURP makes at least quarterly contact with the Sheriff, inviting him to the tobacco coalition meeting and sending him the results of the YTPS, STAKE Act and HSHC store observation data collected.

### *Youth access to tobacco products*

With the help of the three trained youth volunteers and two adult chaperones in June 2015, SCTURP conducted the YTPS in six of six tobacco retail stores throughout the county. The YTPS was conducted using the standard protocol with a consummated purchase in which the youth buys the tobacco product but does not lie about his or her age if asked. The standardized instrument and protocol were developed by S.T.O.R.E.

The YTPSs were conducted by survey teams composed of one to two youth surveyors, ranging in age from 15 to 20, accompanied by an adult chaperone. As indicated by the standard protocol, stores were visited by an adult and a youth, who attempted to purchase tobacco. If the retailer proceeds to sell the merchandise without any additional questions, the youth is to pay for the purchase and leave. If the retailer asks for identification or asks the youth's age, the individual is instructed to tell the truth. The adult and youth then complete the data collection instrument

together upon leaving the store before going on to the next store. If a sale was made, the Sheriff followed up by issuing a citation for illegals sales to a minor, a violation of Penal Code 308.

As indicated above, a second YTPS was planned for summer 2016. Youth were trained but law enforcement was unavailable to participate in the surveys. After conducting the Midwest Academy Strategy Chart again with the TRL Task Force, another approach was determined and a request was made for Environmental Health to conduct the compliance checks. With only one staff person in SCTURP, getting the assistance of Environmental Health would help get the compliance checks done as well as alleviate the SCTURP workload. However, this request was considered not feasible by the public health leadership at that time. Moreover, during that time the age of sale for tobacco products was raised to 21. As a result, the Friday Night Live youth were too young to participate and SCTURP had to recruit young adults instead.

Over the three-year workplan, three YTPSs were planned and two were conducted with the second survey taking place in June 2017. The second survey was completed with the help of two young adult volunteers, an adult chaperone and the SCTURP Project Director.

As Table 2 illustrates, the buy rate fluctuated considerably during past surveys. However, in the 2015 and 2017 surveys, the results were consistent in that one store in each survey (17% in 2015; 20% in 2017) sold tobacco to the underage decoy. This was despite having Age-of-Sale Warning signs posted and asking for an ID (in one of two cases). This information was shared with coalition members, law enforcement and policymakers through presentations, one-on-one meetings, in SCTURP’s Tobacco News newsletter and one-on-one merchant education (discussed below).

**Table 2: Youth Tobacco Purchase Survey Results 2010 – 2017.**

	2010	2011	2012	2013	June 2015					June 2017				
	Sales Rate	Sales Rate	Sales Rate	Sales Rate	# of Stores Surveyed	Age/ID Requested	STAKE Act/Warning Signs	# of Stores That Sold	Sales Rate	# of Stores Surveyed	Age/ID Requested	STAKE Act/Warning Signs	# of Stores That Sold	Sales Rate
<b>Sierra County Retailers<sup>2</sup></b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>40%</b>	<b>57%</b>	<b>0%</b>	6	6	6	1	<b>17%</b>	5	4	5	1	<b>20%</b>

*Store observation*

At the end of year two of the project, in June 2016, the SCTURP Project Director and an adult volunteer conducted the HSHC store observations in a sample of three tobacco retailers in the county.<sup>3</sup> Although youth were trained, they did not conduct the store observation survey because of scheduling difficulties. The project opted to include a census of stores for this statewide data collection to allow for comparisons between the 2013 baseline and 2016 follow-up round of

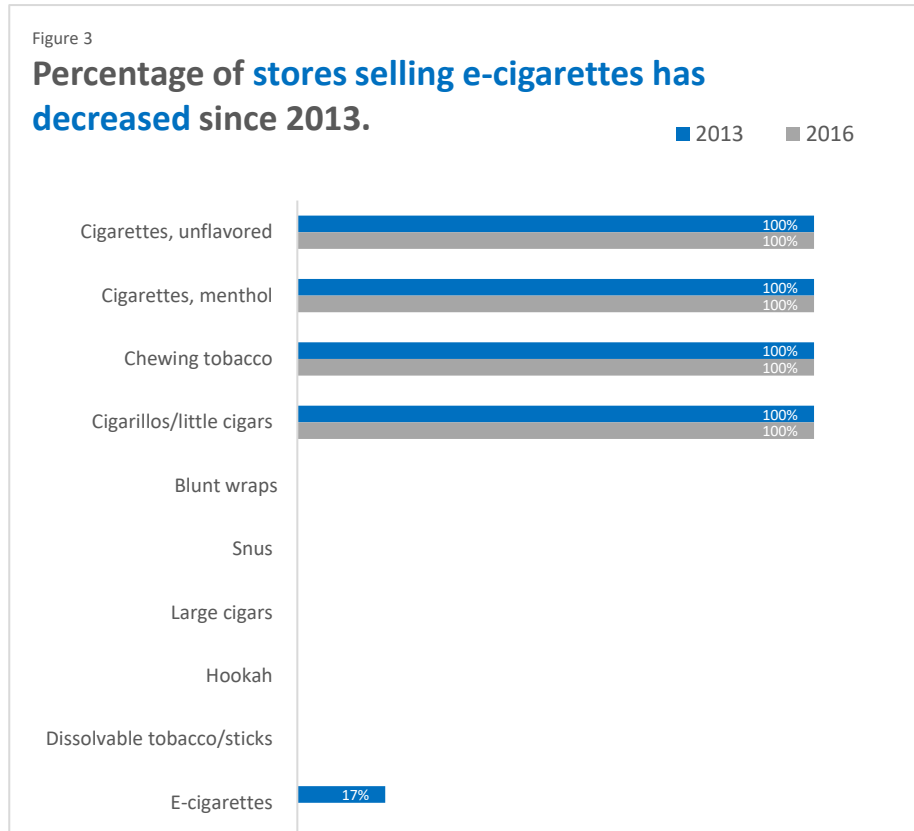
<sup>2</sup> There were six retailers in 2015, 2 in Loyaltan and 4 in the unincorporated areas of the county. For the 2017 survey there were five retailers that sold tobacco, 2 in Loyaltan and 3 in the unincorporated areas of the county.

<sup>3</sup> A list of 6 retailers was provided by the Tobacco Control Evaluation Center for the 2016 survey. Of these 6, 1 store was permanently closed (in Downieville), 1 store was actually a bar not a tobacco retailer (in Downieville), and 2 attempts were made to survey one store with no success (in Sierra City). This resulted in a net sample size of 3 tobacco retail stores (2 in Loyaltan and 1 in Sierraville). Of 4 retailers in Sierra County open at the time of the survey, 3 were included in the store observation survey.

observations. However, after repeated attempts without success, surveying the fourth store was abandoned. The observation survey was conducted using the standardized instrument and protocol provided by Stanford University for all Local Lead Agencies statewide. The instrument was used as is, without modifications.

Important to SCTURP’s workplan was a measure of the availability of different tobacco products. During the 2016

observation survey, it was no surprise that every retailer sold tobacco products like cigarettes, chew and cigarillos (Figure 3). However, what was a surprise was the lack of presence of e-cigarettes in stores. This is in sharp contrast to other communities statewide in which the availability of e-cigarettes, vapor devices or e-liquids has risen dramatically. For example, the availability of e-cigarettes in Plumas County has increased from 39% to 57%, Lassen County from 48% to 81%, and



Butte County from 47% to 77% (Haun, 2016). Anecdotally, two of the tobacco retailers indicated that e-cigarettes do not sell well. For that reason, they no longer stock them.

The percentage of stores selling menthol cigarettes (100%) was higher than the state (92%). Moreover, flavored non-cigarette tobacco (fruit, liquor and mint flavors) was much more available in tobacco retail stores in Sierra County compared to the state (100%, in contrast to 82%). Flavored products mask the harsh taste of tobacco, making it much easier for youth to get hooked on nicotine (Cullen, J. et al., 2011).

Price promotions on tobacco products inside the store were also significantly higher in Sierra County (67%) compared to the state (45%). All (100%) of the tobacco retail stores surveyed in Sierra County had 10% or less of the windows and clear doors covered by signs, in contrast to the state average of 38%. None (0%) of the tobacco retail stores in Sierra County had more than 33% of windows and clear doors covered by signs, in contrast to 35% for the state. However, two of the stores were small markets, which may explain the lack of signs or advertisements.

SCTURP used these findings in presentations and fact sheets to illustrate the need for licensing ordinances that enforce underage sales bans to keep these products away from youth, as well during one-on-one merchant education.

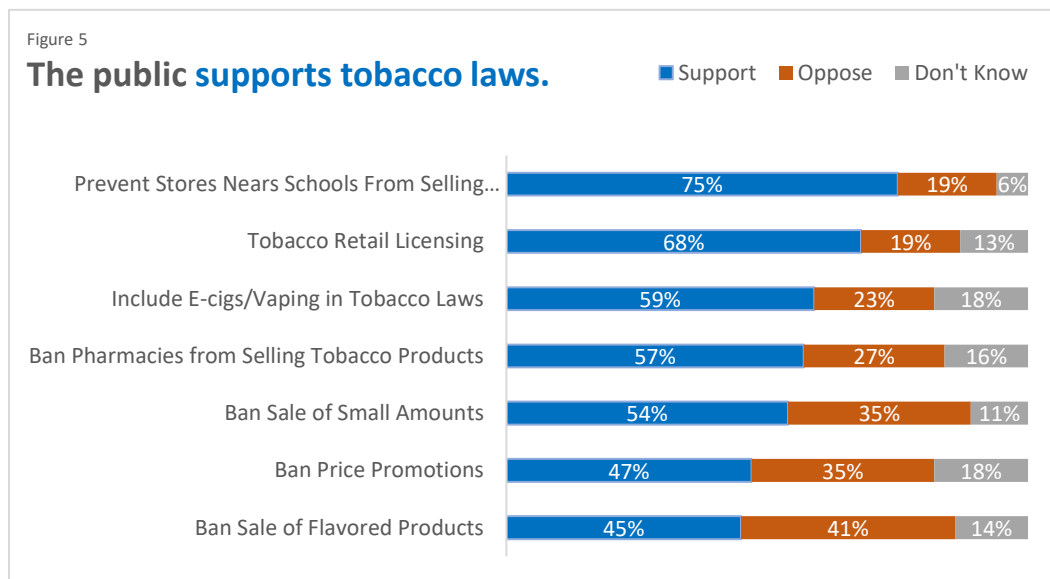
*Public opinion*

To explore public sentiment about a variety of tobacco policy options, SCTURP implemented a Public Intercept Survey in the fall/winter of 2016, at the start of the project's year three. The public intercept survey was part

of the HSHC statewide data collection process and was conducted in Loyalton, Downieville and Sierra City outside post offices, Health & Human Services or Public Health Offices, WIC Clinics and at the Club Live Football Game in Loyalton. The survey, using the standardized instrument and protocol developed by TCEC, was conducted with the help of four trained youth, an adult surveyor and SCTURP project staff from September 2016 to January 2017, in English. A total of 30 items were assessed including the availability of cigarettes, chew and other products.



Figure 4 above shows the perception of availability of products from a convenience sample of 102 survey participants (13 from Downieville, 53 from Loyalton, 21 from Alpine, 9 from Sierra City and 6



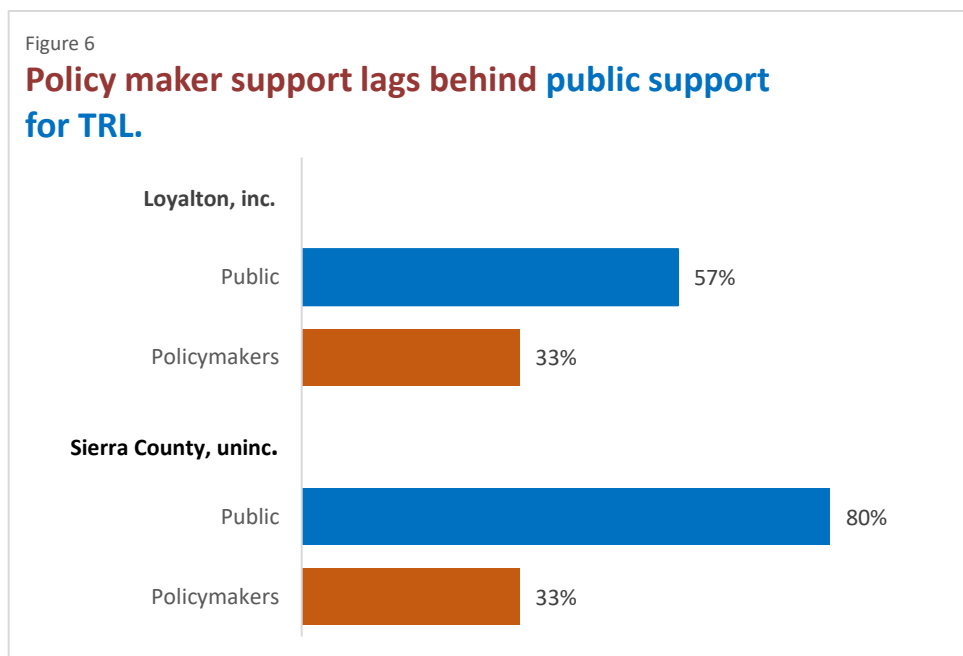
from Sierraville).<sup>4</sup> Note that there is a different perception of availability than actual availability of products. For example, 60% of respondents indicated that e-cigarettes were readily available in stores. However, the store observation identified that no store (0%) of the stores in the same jurisdictions carried these products. Only 48% of respondents indicated that cigarillos are easy to buy, indicating survey participant’s perception of availability. However, the store observation showed that all (100%) of the stores carry cigarillos. This information showed the need for more public education to raise awareness among the general public.

SCTURP also asked respondents whether or not they would support a TRL policy. Figure 5 shows that 68% of respondents were in support for a policy to address illegal sales of tobacco products to minors. There was even more support (75%) for preventing stores near schools from selling tobacco. This information seemed to indicate public momentum for a policy to address illegal sales of tobacco products to minors.

*Comparing attitude changes over time*

Between October 2016 and June 2017, SCTURP collected information from policy makers as part of the HSHC statewide data collection effort in a round of Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). In rural counties, personal relationships are valued highly and getting to know local opinion leaders is key to culturally competent interventions (TCEC, 2011). Policy makers, retailers and key community leaders were purposively selected in each of

the two jurisdictions in the county, three from the City of Loyalton, three from among the Sierra County supervisors, three tobacco retailers, and three key community leaders, for a total of 12 informants. Each were asked 15 questions including whether or not government should play a role in making the retail environment healthier and support or opposition to specific policies. This information was compared to the 2014 baseline survey, as well as with the Public Intercept Survey,



the two jurisdictions in the county, three from the City of Loyalton, three from among the Sierra County supervisors, three tobacco retailers, and three key community leaders, for a total of 12 informants. Each were asked 15 questions including whether or not government should play a role in making the retail environment healthier and support or opposition to specific policies. This information was compared to the 2014 baseline survey, as well as with the Public Intercept Survey,

<sup>4</sup> The data for the 2014 public intercept survey were not available. Due to turnover in project staff early in the three-year scope of work period, some data was not found. For that reason, a comparison between the 2014 public intercept survey and the 2016 survey could not be made.



to identify support or opposition to tobacco retail licensing (Figure 6) in the two jurisdictions. Across the board, there was an increase in support for tobacco retail licensing specifically among policy makers since 2014 (from 0% to 33%). There was also support from the public in the city of Loyalton (57%) and even more support among the public for TRL in the unincorporated areas of the county (80%). However, the support among policymakers was less than support among the public. Moreover, the KIIs did not reveal a champion from among the BOS or the Loyalton City Council. Given the limited support among policy makers, SCTURP opted to continue education with the public, policy makers, and with merchants.

### *Media and statewide press event*

Project staff, coalition members and youth sent out press releases and paid advertisements to all three media outlets in the area, including online, over the three-year project period. The Sierra Booster and Mountain Messenger printed articles and ads. SCTURP also distributed information at least quarterly through the project's Tobacco News newsletter.

Project staff also took part in the coordinated regional press event to release findings in March 2017 from the Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community store observations. None of the three outlets picked up the story. However, other tobacco-related stories were in the local news. From March through May 2017, only one piece appeared in the local media, an article about the Prop. 56 tax increase on tobacco. The article was neutral in sentiment and may have reached 1,500 people in Sierra County. Additionally, some residents get their news from the Sacramento Bee where two online articles were found; one regarding the Prop. 56 Tobacco Tax assisting with Medi-Cal funding if the Affordable Health Care is repealed. The other article was focused on tobacco industry discounts and the fight that one Sacramento lawmaker has taken up to prohibit coupons. These articles may have reached 279,000 in the region. The fact that there was little information published in the local media indicated that SCTURP cannot rely on earned media to educate the community. Instead, it has to use a combination of paid media, events and educational presentations.

### *Retailer education*

Because of the conservative political climate and the inability to collect more than two rounds of Youth Tobacco Purchase Survey (YTPS) data during the three-year workplan, SCTURP focused on merchant education. Several visits were made to each of the tobacco retailers in the county annually; some were made by coalition members, others by the Project Director, with each visit being approximately 30 minutes long. In the first year of the project (June 2015), retailers were provided with ChangeLab Solutions Tobacco Control Law booklet and STAKE Act resource materials including the "Warning: Selling tobacco to kids could cost you!" poster, the 2014 TRL fact sheet describing the problem of illegal sales to minors and the 2013 California Retailer Presentation, as a quick reminder on how to check for age and what to look for on a California Driver's License.

In the second project year (May 2016), merchants were again visited and provided an educational packet regarding the S.T.O.R.E. initiative. Merchants were also advised of the new Tobacco 21 law passed earlier in the month and provided Tobacco 21-related information including a letter to retailers from the California Department of Public Health and Age-of-Sale Warning Signs. Merchant education was again performed in January 2017, in the third year of the project, to determine if there were any technical assistance or information needs regarding the Tobacco 21 law. The relationship



building that occurred during the three-year plan helped to get three of the four merchants in the county to participate in the key informant interviews (noted above).

### *Sharing results*

Key findings were shared to audiences throughout the three-year workplan in the form of presentations, fact sheets in educational outreach kits, press releases, website posts, and in the project's Tobacco News newsletter distributed quarterly. In addition, tobacco prevention coalition members and members of the TRL Task Force each received a copy of this report and discussed it at the last coalition meeting of the funding cycle.

## **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

SCTURP's goal of passing a local tobacco retail license in each of Sierra County's two jurisdictions was not met. In the end, the project's efforts were not successful in convincing policy makers that a licensing ordinance would reduce the illegal sales rate and not harm local businesses. This is despite having data that shows high public support. To date, neither of the two jurisdictions in Sierra County, the City of Loyalton or the County of Sierra, has adopted a tobacco retail licensing policy.

While there was data available from the Youth Tobacco Purchase Surveys from 2010, the number of retailers in the county is small. Moreover, no illegal sales in 2013 and only one illegal sales out of six tobacco retailers in 2015 and five tobacco retailers 2017 was not enough to convince policymakers of the need for tobacco retail licensing. However, continuing to monitor illegal sales rates through the YTPS may be necessary to convince policymakers of the need for regulating the retail environment.

Given the conservative political climate, the project would have benefited from having the support of law enforcement. However, tobacco control was not among the priorities of the new Sheriff elected in year two of the project. This lack of support, along with limited access to youth who weren't known to the tobacco retailers, affected the YTPS. For that reason, consulting another jurisdiction that has established a relationship with law enforcement may help. Similarly, consulting with the California Youth Advocacy Network and providing activities tailored to youth may make the difference and help to overcome local youth-engagement challenges.

Providing data on a comparable jurisdiction that has adopted a tobacco retail licensing policy when approaching the Board of Supervisors or the Loyalton City Council, as well as more public support through larger sample sizes may also be necessary to convince policy makers.

The Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community statewide data collection provided valuable local information in terms of public opinion, store observations, opinions of key leaders and media activity. The workload is considerable for a program with only one staff member. Future work should include building the program's capacity by engaging the tobacco coalition members, adding temporary or permanent staff, or by establishing subcontracts with community-based organizations, to alleviate the workload created by these important statewide data collection processes.

Community education and outreach activities – making presentations, soliciting letters of endorsement, etc. – do seem to have made an impact in building support for regulating the retail environment among the public and community-based organizations. Furthermore, the merchant education appears to have stabilized the illegal sales rate to underage youth. Future work should include continuing regular merchant education.

Use of paid advertisements guaranteed publication in print media, as well as use of the project's Tobacco News newsletter. The statewide press event and media campaign related to the Healthy Stores for a Healthy Community initiative was not helpful at generating positive press locally. Going forward, SCTURP will need to do a combination of building its newsletter's mailing list, using paid media, events and educational presentations as part of its community education arsenal. The American Lung Association (ALA) Report Card could also be leveraged more widely going forward, since the ALA has a positive reputation and credibility across the state.

The conservative political climate made progress difficult but not impossible. Based on what worked well in this project, SCTURP will continue to try to involve youth in project activities, and will focus on public outreach to make both the public and policy makers aware of how to limit exposure to pro-tobacco influences and keep tobacco products out of the hands of youth.

During the 2017-2021 workplan, SCTURP plans to continue to work in the retail environment. However, given the challenges regarding tobacco retail licensing and the support for restricting the use of electronic smoking devices evident in the public intercept survey and among policymakers, SCTURP plans to work on a policy that prohibits the sale or distribution of ESDs. Approaching policymakers with an issue that will have no monetary implications for local retailers may be the ticket to opening the door to tobacco retail licensing.

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