



**COUNTY OF RIVESIDE
COMMUNITY HEALTH AGENCY
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC HEALTH**

Date: July 14, 2006

Released By: Florence Neglia, Director
Health Promotion and
Professional Development
(951) 358-7131

Contact: Robert Peterson, Director
Tobacco Licensing Program
(951) 358-4977
(951) 358-4920

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

County Moves Toward Uniform Tobacco Policy

Riverside County is moving toward a uniform tobacco retail licensing policy which would be the first such countywide policy in the State of California. With the recent addition of the cities of Murrieta, Riverside and San Jacinto joining Temecula, Corona and Norco; twenty five per cent of the County's 24 cities have adopted tobacco licensing requirements for their retailers. More cities will be considering the measure in upcoming city council meetings this summer. Once cities adopt the County ordinance, they will defer to the County Department of Public Health for all oversight, regulation and enforcement. The \$350 annual license fee will provide revenue for staff to oversee the licensing requirements and conduct decoy "sting" operations which identify merchants who sell to minors. Merchants who are caught selling to minors face license revocation and hefty fines. "This sends a clear message to all who sell tobacco and especially those who sell to our kids that we are very serious about this issue," according to Robert Peterson, Director of the County's Tobacco Licensing Program. "Ten thousand underage teens light up for the first time each year in Riverside County, many of them starting with the easy purchase of tobacco in our County," according to Peterson.

In an attempt to address the 44% sales to minors' rate in the County, which is one of the highest in the state, the Board of Supervisors unanimously adopted one of the toughest licensing requirements in California in September of 2005. "Underage tobacco use is a very serious public health problem and licensing has been shown to sharply reduce the illegal sale of tobacco to minors in the cities and counties in California that have adopted it," according to Susan Harrington, Director of the Riverside County Department of Public Health.. "It makes much more sense to keep our kids from starting to smoke rather than treating their lung cancer and emphysema as adults," said Harrington.

Merchants must apply for a license and renew it each year in order to sell tobacco in Riverside County. Features of the ordinance include a ban on mobile sales of tobacco, requiring clerks who sell tobacco to be at least 18 years of age, and mandatory ID checks on anyone who appears to be under the age of 27.

For more information, call the Riverside County Department of Public Health, Tobacco Retail Licensing Program at (951) 358-7157.

#####