

**HEALTH**

## City to regulate sale of tobacco



The Desert Sun

Smoke 'em if you got 'em. Unless you're under 18.

[Michelle Park](#)

The Desert Sun

July 12, 2007 July 12, 2007

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### Coachella permits could be revoked in hopes of curbing sales to minors

In an attempt to snuff out sales of tobacco to minors, Coachella on Wednesday became the first city in the valley to require tobacco retailers to obtain and renew annual licenses from the county to sell tobacco.

Coachella City Council members voted unanimously to adopt the ordinance.

The decision comes on the heels of a youth-decoy sting operation that found 41 percent of merchants in Coachella sold tobacco products to underage decoys who worked for the Riverside County Department of Public Health.

When the ordinance takes effect in August, the county's Office of Tobacco Licensing will notify businesses that they have 30 days to obtain licenses at a cost of \$350, said Robert Peterson, director of the licensing program.

Enforced by the county, the licensing program applies to unincorporated areas and those cities that adopt it.

Several cities in western Riverside County, including Banning, Beaumont and Riverside, have adopted the ordinance. Many have since reduced their rates of sales to minors, according to county research.

Without the county license and enforcement, the only punishment under state law for selling tobacco to a minor is the citation of the clerk, Peterson said. He later said that penalty is "not enough."

If a store can lose its license and right to sell tobacco products, which constitute a large revenue source for many convenience stores, Peterson anticipates owners will better ensure their clerks are following the law.

Rich Valadez, assistant customer first manager at Food 4 Less in Coachella, which sells tobacco products, isn't so sure. He said he would expect only half of penalized businesses to change.

"Some are just out there to please the kids. They're not out there for the business," he said. "Others may learn their lesson."