

Stopping teens from smoking is a big challenge many communities face today. Many communities can only watch without action while local businesses continue to sell tobacco products to minors, even under risk of penalty of law.

Recent studies show that a large percentage of teens today are getting their cigarettes from stores, mostly gas stations or convenience store. As teens continue to be able to buy their own cigarettes, more and more communities begin to impose stronger punishments on merchants who sell to the teens.

One community has experienced success in their attempts to stop the sale of tobacco products to minors. Woodridge, Illinois, started a program seven years ago which forbade and strictly punished the sale of tobacco products to minors. The entire program includes local licensing of vendors, repeated undercover inspections to see if the sale to minors has stopped, and education programs in schools. Woodridge has become a model community as other communities are moving to stop teen tobacco use.

A recent national study showed that 36.5% of females, and 40.8% of males buy their cigarettes from stores, whether it be a gas station or a supermarket. Hopefully, as more and more merchants see the trouble they face if caught selling to minors, they will stop selling.

True, tightening down on stores that sell tobacco to minors isn't going to completely stop the problem of teen tobacco use. Teens continue to get them from other sources. But it definitely does hamper their efforts. With more education in schools, and perhaps stronger punishments for teens caught with tobacco, more and more teens will see the problems with the tobacco usage, and will stop the habit.