Building the Evidence Base for Voluntary and Incentivized Point of Purchase Tobacco Advisory Signage

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Introduction

While CDC has identified Point-of-Purchase tobacco signage as an evidence based strategy for educating smokers and nonsmokers on the health risks of smoking, legal rulings in 2010 have restricted any mandate for signage in retail venues that sell tobacco products. As a result of the legal ruling, the Jefferson County, Alabama CPPW program launched a two stage initiative to address the point-of-purchase strategy by first promoting signage in 61 convenience store locations for voluntary participation followed by incentivizing voluntary signage placement through policy change.

Convenience stores were targeted for participation because they are a primary outlet in underserved neighborhoods. These neighborhoods suffer from increased smoking prevalence as compared to others communities. Accordingly, Six 11”x17” signs were developed with messaging that warns of the dangers of smoking (both to the smoker and to others around them) and directs viewers to the Alabama Quitline number, a free cessation resource.

Procedures:

Development: An environmental analysis of fifteen Jefferson County convenience stores and supermarkets was conducted to assess the placement of tobacco marketing and advertising materials as well as sizes. This information influenced the placement suggestions made to owners as well as the size of the tobacco advisory signage.

In addition to the environmental analysis, two focus groups were conducted with smokers and nonsmokers from Jefferson County to inform the development and selection of signage. Participants were asked to critique images and written text proposed for the signage in accordance to salience, grotesqueness, and overall appeal.

Focus groups’ feedback, stakeholder meetings, proposed FDA cigarette package labels, and international signs and labels influenced the tobacco advisory signage final layout. The finalized signs were initially placed in 50 convenience stores throughout Jefferson County.

Implementation: Phase One

Phase 1: A Tobacco Retail Warning Specialist canvassed randomly selected convenience stores in Jefferson County. The owner or other decision maker/manager was specifically addressed, describing the effort and signs as well as the future policy to incentivize posting. A toolkit was presented highlighting health statistics related to tobacco use, research, and other information to get buy-in from the store management as a long term supporter of posting the signage. All participants were asked to sign a pledge of support stating their willingness to voluntarily comply.

The six signs were presented to and selected by businesses in these individual meetings. Of the 61 convenience stores approached, 50 business owners in locations throughout Jefferson County elected to place signage prior to any incentive given by the health department. Two examples of the signage offered to owners are shown below. Each owner or key decision maker chose from six different signs.

Implementation: Phase Two

Phase 2: In October 2011, the Jefferson County Board of Health unanimously voted to adopt a policy proposed by the Jefferson County Department of Health to incentivize convenience stores and other venues selling tobacco products (with a JCDH issued food permit) to voluntarily post tobacco advisory signage. The policy was drafted by a team which included legal representation, JCDH public health environmentalists, and CPPW employees. The policy grants Food and Safety Health Inspectors license to award two points to the venue’s overall health rating given no critical violations are assessed during routine health inspections.

The two incentive points are awarded if signage is posted at the point of purchase or in another conspicuous. The pictures below illustrates typical conspicuous signage placement points.

Results

Among the 50 original convenience store owners that agreed to voluntarily post signage, there has been a 94% retention rate at the time of follow-up visits, conducted about three months after the last of the 50 signs were posted.

Section 4: Conclusion

Even without health department incentives, most convenience stores were willing to voluntarily post point of purchase or conspicuously placed signage. With an incentive, it is hoped that not only will the convenience store owners post tobacco advisory signage in accordance to the JCDH Health Officer’s recommendation, but those who post will keep the sings up indefinitely to retain the perceived benefits of the incentive. With Federal Cigarette Labeling and Advertising Act of 1965 and other regulations limiting the JCDH’s regulatory authority, community engagement and incentives may help achieve intended policy goals where policy change is not an option.

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