

UNDERAGE TOBACCO SALES

For over a century, the sale of tobacco products to minors has been illegal in New Jersey. Until a decade ago, enforcement was almost nonexistent. The Tobacco Age-of-Sale Enforcement (TASE) program was created to change that. The Bridgewater Health Department has utilized TASE since it started in the 1990s. A TASE inspection is an attempt by a minor to purchase cigarettes from a store or gas station. The minor is accompanied to and from the inspection by a Bridgewater Health Department representative. The Bridgewater Health Department is reimbursed for every TASE inspection from a federal grant.

In the beginning, more than a quarter of all tobacco vendors made illegal sales. Several stores have made illegal sales three or more times since TASE started. Fines begin at \$250 for an illegal sale and escalate as the number of violations increase. In recent years, the TASE program has become an unqualified success. No violations occurred in 2005 and only one violation occurred in 2006. Inspections are ongoing for 2007.

According to the US Department of Health and Human Services, one million young people begin smoking each year. Smoking is also the single greatest preventable cause of death. Young smokers are three times more likely to use alcohol and eight times more likely to use marijuana. Studies show that regular tobacco use usually begins before the age of 18 and making cigarettes inaccessible will reduce the likelihood that a person becomes a smoker.