

Introduction to Operation Storefront

The goal of **Operation Storefront** is to raise community awareness of the tobacco and alcohol industries' successful marketing strategies using retail advertising and promotions. Often referred to as point-of-purchase advertising, or POP, this type of advertising includes outdoor banners, window signs, counter, floor and ceiling displays, posters, decals, clocks, calendars and much more. Merchandise promotions are a growing industry.

The growing number of Point-of-Purchase (POP) advertising and promotions in our neighborhood stores is particularly disturbing because children of all ages are unavoidably exposed to these ads. This type of exposure promotes the belief that tobacco and alcohol use is acceptable and more common than it really is. Despite the fact that tobacco companies claim that the \$12.8 billion spent annually (an estimated \$27.4 million in Vermont) on tobacco advertising is intended to maintain brand loyalty, the fact is that these advertising and promotional campaigns are associated with attracting new tobacco users who are often very young. Furthermore, most of this money is directed at retailers.

The tobacco and alcohol companies are smart marketers and know the impact POP and promotional items have on consumers. They recognize the fact that advertising tobacco and alcohol products is going to become increasingly difficult in the future, as public opinion continues to shift and policy makers begin to look at placing more and more restrictions on advertising targeted toward youth.

It is no coincidence that the cigarette brands most often purchased by youth are identical to the brands most heavily advertised. According to a study by the Centers for Disease Control, "Changes in the Cigarette Brand Preferences of Adolescent Smokers," Marlboro, Camel and Newport are the three most heavily advertised brands of cigarettes. While combined sales of these brands accounted for only 35 percent of the overall adult cigarette market, 86 percent of current adolescent smokers purchased these three brands. This demonstrates that kids are more easily influenced than adults by the tobacco companies' advertising and marketing efforts.

The evidence is clear. Tobacco advertising works, and it does more than get adults to switch brands as the tobacco industry would like everyone to believe. Advertising experts agree that expanding the market for a product or service is the primary objective of an advertising and marketing campaign.

There is no evidence to suggest that tobacco and alcohol advertising does not attract new smokers – especially those under the age of 19. In fact, a growing number of studies indicate quite the opposite.

Consider these facts:

- Youth reporting a high level of exposure to advertising were more likely to be smokers than those reporting a low level of exposure to tobacco advertising.
- Youth with a high level of exposure to tobacco ads were also more likely to indicate they planned to smoke in the future.
- Recalling tobacco ads and perceiving that there are benefits to smoking increase a child's susceptibility to begin to smoke.

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Tobacco and alcohol companies appear to be fully aware of the impact their advertising has on younger audiences and tailor their ads accordingly to appear directly to them. For example, a study of magazine imagery found that magazines with a high adolescent readership were significantly more likely to have tobacco and images of adventure, risk and recreation.

There is evidence that tobacco advertising and promotional campaigns, whether intended or not, directly appeal to youth and create an environment in which consumption of these products is desirable and “normal.” The evidence linking advertising and promotions to susceptibility to begin to smoke, initiation rates, and smoking behavior among teens, warrants taking action to reform current tobacco advertising and promotional practices.

To raise community awareness of the pervasiveness of this advertising, the problem must be clearly defined. **Operation Storefront** is an activity designed for youth and adult volunteers to actually document the amount of tobacco and alcohol advertising at local retailers.

Operation Storefront is not in any way designed to single out local merchants. It is an effort to document the problem of tobacco and alcohol advertising targeting youth, and to expose the industries manipulative marketing strategies. No merchant should be singled out except to recognize a merchant for choosing not to display tobacco and alcohol advertisements.

How to Organize Operation Storefront

How can youth and adult volunteers be recruited?

- The VKAT team, with your guidance, is ready to invite peers to join them in this activity. It is important to recruit youth from your school, while representing the diversity of your community. Use the tools that work in your school/group: morning announcements, school newspaper, posters, flyers, etc.
- Actively involve each youth in the survey from the beginning in order to give him/her a sense of ownership.
- Keep the young people motivated to participate in **Operation Storefront** by letting them see how the tobacco and alcohol industry specifically target them in an attempt to replace smokers and chewers who die or quit.

Work with your community advisory committee, and VKAT team members' parents, to identify and recruit adult volunteers. Adults already involved in tobacco, drug and alcohol prevention activities are potential volunteers. Members of the Coalition for a Tobacco Free Vermont, the PTA or voluntary health organizations, such as the American Cancer Society, American Heart Association and the American Lung Association, are likely to assist you.

How many participants do we need?

- The overall number of young people and adults taking part in your **Operation Storefront** activity depends on the number of tobacco and alcohol retailers in your community that you will be surveying.
- To conduct the survey, youth volunteers should work in teams of one or two accompanied by one adult volunteer.

What safety measures should we take?

- Review school/group rules and regulations for off-site activities.
- Always obtain written permission from a parent or guardian for a young person to participate in the **Operation Storefront** survey. Send a letter to parents explaining the activity and enclose a permission slip for them to sign and return to you. Families are also encouraged to participate in **Operation Storefront** – please be sure to always have a supervising adult present and follow these recommended safety measures.
- Never send the youth volunteers into potentially volatile or dangerous situations. If the young people find themselves in any uncomfortable situations while in a store, have them exit immediately. Youth should never confront store clerks or customers for any reason. If problems arise, the youth should immediately notify the adult volunteer.
- Wear seat belts while traveling in a vehicle, and cross streets with caution.

How do we conduct the survey?

- Arrange a meeting time and place for all the teams together, and at that meeting distribute maps/lists of stores to be surveyed, along with survey sheets.
- Have team members introduce themselves to the store manager or clerk before conducting the survey. Ask if you can spend about 10 minutes walking throughout the store to conduct a survey on advertising. Get storeowner permission before taking any photographs of promotional displays and advertising.
- Set a rendezvous time and place to reassemble when teams have finished conducting the surveys. Or, if groups will be working independently, a final date for all surveys to be completed and submitted.

What should we look for?

Teams will literally count the amount of tobacco and alcohol advertising and promotional items located throughout and outside each store, and at the cash register itself. This includes cigarettes, cigars or cigarettos, chew tobacco, and a type of spit less tobacco called “Snus.” A new line of tobacco products which dissolve in the mouth – Orbs (breath mint size), Sticks (like toothpicks) and Strips (like breath strips) – will also be making their way into the Vermont market soon.

POP (or point-of-purchase) refers to displays found in retail outlets, usually around the cash register, that stimulate an impulse purchase and provide information about a particular product, such as tobacco. Much of the tobacco advertising and promotional items found at the POP are designed to include attractive themes, powerful messages and enticing images.

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POP displays come in all forms ranging from the traditional cardboard, metal and plastic displays that feature the product to digital electronic signs and video displays.

Some examples of tobacco industry POP displays and tobacco retail promotion items include:

- Indoor and outdoor sign and banner advertisements, including items hanging from the ceiling.
- Self-service promotional displays located on the floor or on countertops.
- In-store sign/decal advertisements on doors, windows, shopping carts and baskets, and checkout counters.
- Price boards, clocks, calendars, counter placement, and structural additions to checkout counters.
- Alcohol-related promotional merchandise or giveaways with a purchase, such as hats, t-shirts, jackets, mugs, lighters, etc.
- Advertisements of special promotions such as Camel Cash and the Marlboro Adventure Team.
- Two-for-one specials.

Self-service displays are found on or under counters or on the floor, and allows the customer to select an item him or herself without a clerk's assistance. Self-service displays are illegal in Vermont.

How do we complete the survey sheets?

- Always keep the directions for completing the survey sheets with the adult team member in case anyone needs to refresh her/his memory while in the field.
- Pay close attention as you collect the information. There is sometimes so much advertising that it can be very easy to miss some. Double-check your numbers to make sure you have counted everything.
- Remember to write neatly and carefully.
- Assign the youth to conduct the survey. The adult will serve as a resource to the young people and will monitor the progress of the youth volunteers.
- Do not get in the way of customers browsing or making a purchase.
- Work quickly, accurately and quietly.
- Make notes in the margins for things that you think are of special interest.
- Assign the adult team member as each visit is completed to collect the forms and put them in a special envelope for completed surveys.
- It should take approximately 15 minutes to complete each survey: 10 minutes surveying the store inside and out and 5 minutes to review the completed surveys.
- Reassemble all the teams participating in the survey, if possible, so they can share their experiences with each other.
- Make sure that the adult volunteers return the completed survey forms to a designated person.

Operation Storefront – Survey Form

Town: _____ County: _____ (attach photos to this form)

Please check type of store: Small Market Gas Station Chain Convenience
 Chain Supermarket Pharmacy Other _____

Can you see advertising from your: School Park Playground Other _____

PRODUCTS	HOW MANY? (Please write the number in space below)
Cigarettes	
Ads on door and window	
Ads inside of store	
Ads outside of store (telephone pole, lawn sign, etc)	
Products next to candy	
Products, promotion or POP 3 feet high or less	
Power wall (products grouped together, usually in grid, that is high and/or wide)	Circle: YES or NO
Lighted displays	Circle: YES or NO
Smokeless Tobacco	
Chew, snuff, dip, Snus, Orbs, Sticks or Strips	
Ads on door and window	
Ads inside of store	
Ads outside of store (telephone pole, lawn sign, etc)	
Products next to candy	
Products, promotion or POP 3 feet high or less	
Cigars or Cigarillos	
Ads on door and window	
Ads inside of store	
Ads outside of store (telephone pole, lawn sign, etc)	
Products next to candy	
Products, promotion or POP 3 feet high or less	
Flavored products sold	Circle: YES or NO
Three most advertised brands of cigarettes in the store	
Beer, Wine, Alco-pops & Caffeinated Malt Beverages	
Alco-pops include products like Mike's Hard Lemonade, Bacardi Silver, Twisted Tea or Smirnoff Ice	Caffeinated malt beverages include products like Joose, Four Loko and Rockstar 21
Ads on door and window	
Ads inside of store	
Ads outside of store (telephone pole, lawn sign, etc)	
Products, promotion or POP 3 feet high or less	
Cooler ads (on cooler doors)	
Floor displays and/or standing posters	
Free item with purchase	
Alco-pops next to or mixed with non-alcoholic beverages	Circle: YES or NO