



News Release

Attorney General Robert E. Cooper, Jr.

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State Agencies Remind Public, Businesses Single Cigarette Sales Are Illegal

Several Tennessee agencies are working together to help alert the public and businesses to stop the illegal sale of cigarettes that are removed from the pack and sold individually as "loosies." Single cigarette sales pose a health threat to young people because they are usually easier and cheaper for them to purchase than a full package of cigarettes.

An individual can buy a single cigarette for about 25 cents, compared with a pack of cigarettes, which can cost more than \$5 per pack. Health officials are concerned that the availability of individual cigarette sales for purchase may attract young people as an easy, affordable way to begin smoking.

The Attorney General's Office recently sent 23 tobacco retailers alleged to have sold single cigarettes a warning letter, advising them to stop because such action is illegal in Tennessee. The letters were based on complaints received by the Tennessee Department of Agriculture. Tobacco retailers may be subject to penalties of up to \$1,000 per violation under the law for selling single cigarettes.

"We think it is important that tobacco retailers understand that selling single cigarettes is against the law," Attorney General Bob Cooper said. "And, we will prosecute those who ignore the law by continuing to sell single cigarettes after we've warned them not to do so."

Agriculture Commissioner Ken Givens encourages any individual who is aware of a retailer selling single cigarettes to call the Agriculture Department's Complaint Hotline at 1-800-628-2631 and to report the illegal activity. "Illegal cigarette sales hamper our efforts to prevent youth access to tobacco products," said Givens. "We intend to follow up on any reports of retailers selling individual cigarettes."

Data from Tobacco Free Kids reveal that 8,100 new Tennesseans under the age of 18 become smokers each year. Tennessee Department of Health Commissioner Susan Cooper noted, "Research has revealed that the younger an individual starts smoking, the stronger their addiction. So, we think it is of vital importance that retailers not sell single cigarettes, as these can lead to a lifetime of smoking addiction."

Commissioner Virginia Trotter Betts of the Tennessee Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities pointed out the importance of ensuring tobacco is not sold to minors. "The Department of Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities must comply with federal block grant requirements for the prevention of youth access to tobacco," she said. "I hope that retailers

will be responsible and understand that selling single cigarettes to kids could cause our State to lose this important federal funding which is critical for alcohol and drug treatment.”