

In sting, teens buy tobacco with ease

• Stark officials planning another try with police across county helping

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CANTON: Alarming results of a sting targeting illegal tobacco sales in Stark County has convinced officials they need to do another sting, this time involving police.

The results of the sting were not surprising to Becky Schwitzgabel, director of prevention and early detection for the American Cancer Society in Stark County. "But they are disappointing."

"I do a lot of tobacco education in the schools and from what I hear, it's easy to buy cigarettes. It didn't surprise me, but this is bad," she said.

The cancer society, in conjunction with the Stark County Health Department, conducted the sting this month. It is believed to be Stark's first such sting involving 15- and 16-year-old volunteers. They targeted 10 percent of Stark County's 606 licensed tobacco vendors.

Of the 63 establishments visited, 51 percent sold to underage smokers, results of the sting show.

"We already have a commitment from several police departments" to help out with the next sting, Schwitzgabel said.

The teens who participated in the Stark County sting last month were chaperoned by representatives from the American Cancer Society. They visited bowling alleys, gas stations, convenience stores and restaurants in every corner of the county, from Canal Fulton to Waynesburg.

Only 38 establishments asked the teens for identification, according to results.

"A few times they asked for I.D., but they still sold them cigarettes. The clerks weren't really looking at the date, just going through the motions and not really enforcing the law," Schwitzgabel said.

The teens were encouraged to tell the truth about their age and

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