

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

- **How do I apply for the Youth Decoy program?**

You need to fill out the application packet and obtain a California ID (or California license or military ID). If you need a California ID, visit any Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to apply for one. When you go to the DMV, you will need your **ORIGINAL** birth certificate and \$29.00. Ask for a California ID application. When you send us the receipt from the DMV, we will reimburse your family the \$29.00. **Send completed applications and DMV receipts to the Youth Decoy Program, Boys & Girls Clubs of Fresno County, 540 N. Augusta, Fresno, CA 93701.** (Applications must be sent via mail because we need original signatures from you and your guardians)

- **What are the rewards for being an undercover decoy agent?**

For signing up, you will receive up to two gift cards. When you conduct enforcement operations, you will receive \$5 per store visited whether you are sold tobacco or not. When collecting survey data, you will be issued \$5 food coupons per store visited whether you are sold tobacco or not. At the age of 17, or sooner if requested, all youth volunteers receive a letter of recommendation from the Boys & Girls Clubs of Fresno County for volunteering in the program.

- **How often will I work?**

You may or may not be called upon to participate any particular year. Food and Drug Branch (FDB) investigators conduct enforcement operations in each county, but they do not visit each county every year. Sacramento State researchers collect survey data from February through May of every year, but your area may not be randomly selected for data collection any particular year. If you are called to volunteer, you may participate once or several times. On average, you'll visit 15-20 stores in one day, but there are youth who participate with fewer stores depending on location.

- **Do I have to dress up a certain way when I work?**

No! Be yourself. We ask that you be honest about your age and demeanor. We are not trying to trick anyone. We expect that stores check your ID as required by law and refuse to sell to you, but that is not always the case.

- **How do I know when I'm working? Who picks me up?**

There are two agencies who may call you to set up an appointment for work. The FDB and Sacramento State schedule all decoy volunteers over the phone. They usually call a couple of weeks in advance to schedule your session. FDB compliance checks are carried out year-round while the Youth Tobacco Purchase Survey data collection occurs only in the Spring of each year. FDB investigators and Sacramento State researchers pick you up and drop you off from school or home, and accompany you to all stores.

- **Where will you take me when I work?**

Any store in the state that sells tobacco products is eligible for a compliance check, such as liquor stores, grocery stores, smoke shops, etc. To complete these compliance checks, you will most likely work outside your own neighborhood, for example, in other cities and neighboring counties.

- **What happens if a store sells me cigarettes? Do they get fined?**

If a store sells tobacco to you, all you do is return to your supervisor who will be in the car outside. You hand them the receipt, change, and merchandise. Fines are issued days after you were at the store and no one will know that you participated in the compliance check. The protection of your identity is crucial for the success of this program. Fines vary per offense, from \$600 for the first offense and up to \$6,000 for multiple illegal sales violations. No fines are issued as a result of your participation in the Sacramento State Youth Tobacco Purchase Survey.

- **Can I get in trouble if a store tries to go to court over the fine?**

No, youth participating in these programs have full immunity from prosecution. In the 17-year history of the program, no decoy has had to go to court to provide testimony. Although a decoy has not had to participate in a trial or courtroom, we cannot promise that the decoy will not be called to testify in a case. By participating in the compliance checks, the decoy will need to be available for 5 years to either testify, provide a declaration and/or write a narrative report if requested to do so. We collect evidence during compliance checks, including receipts of sale. Some volunteers are videotaped during compliance checks as evidence.

- **Is the program dangerous?**

There is slight risk with any compliance check however the FDB has successfully completed over 56,000 compliance checks with no incidents or injury with the Youth Tobacco Purchase Survey also reporting no incidents since it began over 17 years ago.

- **I live in a small community. What if someone recognizes me?**

The program is highly motivated to protect your identity. We will not take you into your immediate community, unless you are comfortable with that. We may even take you into a bordering county, protecting your identity.

- **Does the FDB contact the health departments before or after a compliance check is performed in that county?**

No. They usually do not contact the health departments before the compliance checks. However, the outcomes of the compliance checks may be requested by the health department.

- **I did this once for the Health Department. How is this program different?**

The compliance checks you may have participated in with your local health department are completely different than the “undercover” compliance checks for this program. The compliance checks associated with this program are federally mandated due to an act passed in 1992 called the Synar Amendment. The Synar Amendment calls for states to pass and enforce laws that prohibit the sale of tobacco products to minors. The Synar Amendment also requires states to determine their rate of illegal sales of tobacco to persons under age 18 on an annual basis. This federal law led to the passing of California’s Stop Tobacco Access To Kids Enforcement Act (S.T.A.K.E. Act) in 1994. Under a separate contract with the FDB, we also recruit youth to be “undercover” decoys for illegal sales compliance checks required by another federal law called the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act. This law is enforced by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

- **What if I sign up and I never get called for work? Why should I join?**

Even if you don’t get the opportunity to work, you will still receive many complementary incentives up to \$50.00. We will pay for your California ID (a \$29.00 value) if you complete the application process. You will also receive a letter of recommendation from the Boys & Girls Clubs of Fresno County.

- **Where do you find youth volunteers?**

We recruit through our website, ads in high school newspapers, videos, health fairs, youth coalitions, school presentations, recommended friends, youth after-school programs and many non-profit youth organizations.

- **Can I call you if I have any questions or to get more information?**

Yes. Call us toll-free 1-855-DECOYCA. We will do whatever it takes to assist you in your application process. We will also be calling you if you send in your application or interest form. Make sure that the address and telephone number you give us is where you can be easily reached.

- **Do you have a website?**

Yes, www.decoyca.org