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Sydney city business fined \$6,600 for selling illegal cigarettes

Tobacco retailers in South Eastern Sydney are being warned they may face heavy fines if they sell tobacco from illegal sources or packets of cigarettes that do not display the required health warnings.

The warning from South Eastern Sydney Local Health District (SESLHD) comes after a tobacco retailer in Hunter Street in the Sydney CBD was fined a total of \$6,600 for three separate charges of selling illegal tobacco. The fine was handed down on Monday 5 August 2019 at the Downing Centre Court.

Professor Mark Ferson, Director of the SESLHD Public Health Unit, said the \$6,600 fine against Hunter Connection Tobacconist was a timely reminder to other tobacco retailers that they will be caught and fined if they sell illegal tobacco.

“The Magistrate noted the defendant was guilty of purchasing tobacco from illegal sources, whom he did not report to the appropriate authorities. The same business was also fined \$750 last year for selling tobacco to minors,” Professor Ferson said.

Under the Public Health (Tobacco) Act 2008, it is an offence to sell illegal tobacco, with a maximum fine of \$110,000 per tobacco brand.

“Compliance with the legislation is closely monitored. Authorised Officers from the Public Health Unit conduct random inspections and can issue warnings, fines or initiate prosecutions against retailers that break the law.”

Professor Ferson also said that on 26 June 2019 at Sutherland Local Court a tobacco retailer in Penshurst was fined \$80,000 for illegally selling chewing tobacco as well as selling packets of cigarettes without health warnings.

The NSW Government is committed to reducing the prevalence of smoking and protecting people from second-hand smoke and the sale of illegal and unbranded cigarettes.

Over the past 10 years, the NSW Government, through the Cancer Institute NSW (CINSW), has invested more than \$106 million on anti-tobacco public education campaigns and tobacco control initiatives. In 2019–20, the NSW Ministry of Health and CINSW will invest \$17.3 million on tobacco control. This includes public awareness and education campaigns, quit smoking support, compliance and enforcement of strong smoke-free and retailing laws, and targeted programs for vulnerable groups with high smoking rates.

NSW has experienced a consistent downward trend in the prevalence of smoking, with current smoking among NSW adults decreasing from 22.5 per cent in 2002 to 14.8 per cent in 2018.

Pleasingly, fewer young people are smoking in general, with smoking rates among students aged 12-17 years declining from 10.3 per cent in 2005 to 6.4 per cent in 2017.

All members of the community can help reduce the sale of chewing and unbranded tobacco by reporting suspected breaches of the law to the local Public Health Unit on 1300 066 055 or to the Tobacco Information Line on 1800 357 412. All complaints are dealt with confidentially.