City Officials, Residents Will Partner to Enforce New Tobacco Rule

Individual Helena residents will play a key role in enforcing a new city ordinance aimed at reducing access to tobacco products, especially by youth.

The Helena City Commission passed the ordinance last November. City and public health officials, along with youth, store managers, and others who were instrumental in supporting the ordinance, gathered Wednesday to celebrate the victory and to provide more details about how the ordinance will be enforced.

The ordinance prohibits “self-serve” store displays of tobacco products. Under the new rule, customers must ask store employees to get tobacco products for them from behind the counter. The ordinance does not apply to stores that cater only to adults.

Anyone who violates the ordinance is subject to a fine of up to $1,000 a day.

“I’m proud that Helena is the first city in the state with an ordinance like this,” said City Commissioner Andres Haladay. “This is a critical and necessary first step in combating youth access to tobacco products, especially flavored products and under-regulated vapor and e-products. We know that these are designed and marketed to addict a new generation.”

According to City Manager Ana Cortez, the ordinance will be “complaint-driven.” Any resident who sees a violation can go to the City of Helena website to lodge a complaint via the “How Do I” section on the homepage at www.helenamt.gov. The City Attorney’s Office will review evidence and, if the violation is credible, a citation will be issued.

City commissioners adopted the new ordinance with the support of Lewis and Clark Public Health in part because almost 9 of 10 tobacco users start before age 18.
“Many scientific studies show that store displays of tobacco and nicotine products -- especially those with sweet flavors -- promote use in minors,” Sarah Sandau, Prevention Program Supervisor for LCPH, told them. “This ordinance assists in preventing youth initiation and helping those who want to quit tobacco.”

“We as a city need to keep working toward better ways to better regulate and limit youth access to tobacco products,” Haladay said, “but I’m glad Helena is leading the way in Montana.”

The ordinance is available on the City of Helena website at