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STARS Project Rhode Island - Using retail assessments to document tobacco industry marketing and advertising in your community.

Youth are regular frequenters to retail stores where they buy drinks, candy, snacks and other products. At the same time, tobacco companies are spending more than 90 percent of their marketing budget (\$10 billion a year) to have their products marketed and displayed. Upon visiting most convenience stores you will find a myriad of flavored and inexpensive, tobacco products placed where young people can see them and access them. Many are colorfully packaged fruit- and candy-flavored cigars, and other slickly packaged, cheaply priced tobacco products.

The **Standardized Tobacco Assessment of Retail Settings (STARS)** is a national survey tool whereby community partners or youth can collect retail store tobacco product observational data. The assessment focuses on tobacco product price, promotion, flavor, and placement of specific brands of cigarettes, little cigars, cigarillos, snus, snuff, electronic cigarettes, dissolvable tobacco, and other tobacco products. STARS serves to educate decision makers, community based organizations and individuals as to the prevalence of tobacco products in retail settings, and inform policy decision making in regard to limiting youth access to these deadly products.

STARS is user friendly. It takes an estimated 10 minutes to complete the survey and the form can be completed by self-trained youth and adults. STARS training materials are available online, and Department of Health can assist with training. STARS does not include or involve tobacco youth compliance checks. STARS resources include:

- STARS survey (1 page, double-sided, 20 questions)
- Training PowerPoint (93 slides for self- or group-administered instruction)
- Pocket Guide (10-page instructional review for use in the field - assembly required)
- Pocket Guide Assembly Instructions (brief instructions on how to assemble pocket guide)
- Excel Data Entry Template (used to enter survey data and compute outcomes)

According to data from the 2013 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance survey, Rhode Island (RI) leads the nation with 28.7% of current smokers self-reporting that they bought their own cigarettes in a store or gas station. In addition, use of other forms of tobacco and nicotine products by youth is on the increase. In 2013, RI's youth cigar and hookah use rates exceeded cigarettes.

Tobacco companies pay retail stores so as to assure that cigarettes and other tobacco products are prominently displayed. This is an effort to appeal to youth and other tobacco users. STARS provides communities with a tool to expose tobacco's marketing strategies, and shine light on policy change initiatives that will reduce youth access to tobacco products in our communities.

We look forward to working with schools, community based organizations, advocates and others on this initiative. Please feel free to contact Geri Guardino, Policy Analyst, RI Tobacco Control Program if you have any questions or need further information. She can be reached at (401) 222-3044 or at geri.guardino@health.ri.gov.