



# Rhode Island Tobacco Control Program 2013 Store Observation Report Abstract

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## What's the issue?

Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death, disease, and disability in the United States. More than 80% of adult smokers begin smoking before the age of 18. Adolescence is therefore a critical time during which protection against tobacco use experimentation and uptake is imperative. Young people visit stores to buy items such as drinks, snacks, and other items. While in these stores, youth are exposed to tobacco displays, colorfully packaged fruit- and candy-flavored cigars, and other slickly packaged, cheaply priced tobacco products. Sometimes these products are placed on the counter which facilitates impulse purchases. In order to better protect youth from the tobacco industry's point of sale advertising, promotion, and product placement tactics, state tobacco control programs need to better understand what the tobacco store landscape looks like across their states. What kinds of emerging tobacco products are available? Are they flavored? Are they placed on the counter? Are there promotions, rendering these products even cheaper and more accessible to price-sensitive youth?

## How did we gather data?

The Rhode Island Tobacco Control Program (TCP) conducted observations of 501 tobacco-vending stores, from a total of approximately 1300 licensed tobacco selling stores, across the state. The TCP trained community partners how to collect store observation data using a program-created observation tool and field guide. The observation form focused on product price, flavor, and placement of specific brands of little cigars, cigarillos, snus, snuff, and dissolvable tobacco. Special offers and price promotions were also observed.

## What did we find?

Fifty eight percent of the stores sampled had flavored Cheyenne little cigars, 62% had other brands of cigarillos flavored, 60% had flavored snus (Marlboro or Camel), and 52% had flavored snuff. All of these products were plainly visible in the store environment. Fourteen percent of stores had Swisher single pack cigars on the counter, 15% of stores had other brands of cigarillos on the counter. Of the stores that had some kind of tobacco product on the counter, whether it was little cigars, cigarillos, snus, or snuff, 96-100% of the stores were categorized as "local" stores as opposed to national chains. Eleven percent of the stores in our

sample had special prices on little cigars, 14% and 13% had special prices and multi-pack discounts on cigarillos, respectively. None of the stores in the sample offered free gifts.

**Table 1.** Number of stores with flavored tobacco products

| Tobacco Product                 | Total Number Stores Responded<br>N | Total Number Stores with Tobacco Product Available<br>n (%) |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| <b>Little Cigars (flavored)</b> |                                    |   |
| Cheyenne                        | 274                                | 160 (58.39%)  |
| Swisher Sweets                  | 190                                | 44 (23.16%)   |
| Other Little Cigars             | 135                                | 39 (28.89%)   |
| <b>Cigarillos (flavored)</b>    |                                    |   |
| Swisher 6-pack                  | 217                                | 92 (42.39%)   |
| Swisher single pack             | 213                                | 100 (46.95%)  |
| Other Cigarillos                | 221                                | 139 (62.90%)  |
| <b>Dissolvables (flavored)</b>  |                                    |   |
| Camel Orbs                      | 152                                | 1 (0.66%)   |
| Ariva                           | 162                                | 16 (9.88%)  |
| Other Dissolvables              | 143                                | 1 (0.70%)   |
| <b>Snus (flavored)</b>          | 219                                | 131 (59.82%)  |
| <b>Snuff (flavored)</b>         | 179                                | 93 (51.96%)   |

**Table 2.** Number of stores with tobacco products on-the-counter

| Tobacco Product      | Total Number Stores Responded<br>N | Total Number Stores with Product On-the-Counter<br>n (%) |
|----------------------|------------------------------------|--|
| <b>Little Cigars</b> |                                    |  |
| Cheyenne             | 194                                | 12 (06.19%)  |
| Swisher Sweets       | 97                                 | 3 (03.09%)   |
| Other Little Cigars  | 61                                 | 5 (08.19%)   |
| <b>Cigarillos</b>    |                                    |  |
| Swisher 6-pack       | 139                                | 6 (04.32%)   |
| Swisher single pack  | 102                                | 14 (13.73%)  |
| Other Cigarillos     | 156                                | 24 (15.38%)  |
| <b>Dissolvables</b>  |                                    |  |
| Camel Orbs           | 1                                  | 0  |
| Ariva                | 17                                 | 0  |
| Other Dissolvables   | 1                                  | 0  |
| <b>Snus</b>          | 132                                | 2 (1.52%)  |
| <b>Snuff</b>         | 102                                | 3 (2.94%)  |

## What can we do now?

Flavored, inexpensive, tobacco products are available in stores that are frequented by children and youth. These products are not only present, they are placed in the store where young people can see them and access them. Communities and states can prevent tobacco-selling stores from initiating their young people into tobacco addiction by first systematically assessing the store environment. Sharing store observation data with community-based stakeholders can help communities begin to address the need to limit the availability of these products to impressionable youth who are vulnerable to industry manipulation at the point of sale.