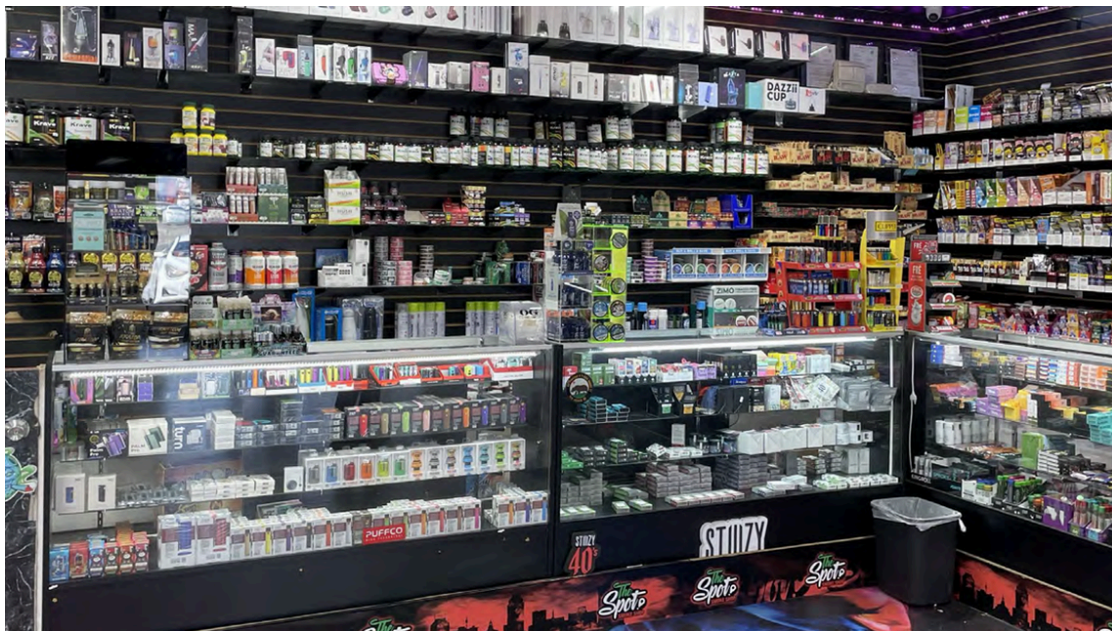


LOCAL

A year into a crackdown on illegal pot, what's happening at Fresno's smoke shops?

By [Joshua Tehee](#)

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Illegal cannabis products are being sold inside smoke shops in Fresno, according to the city attorney's office. *Fresno City Attorney*

Within the first months of looking into the [proliferation of smoke shops around Fresno](#), officials had a sense the storefronts were problematic.

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“We knew from the complaints,” said Fresno City Council member Miguel Arias, who is helping craft an ordinance to regulate the highly-visible and heavily-advertised corner stores.

“And we knew from our site visits.”

The city now has a year’s worth of inspections to prove the point.

In an update during [a Fresno City Council meeting last month](#), the city attorney’s office presented data from its [Cannabis Administrative Prosecutor Program](#), which inspected 67 smoke shops throughout the city.

A majority were engaged in illegal activity.

According to the update, inspectors found:

- Code violations at all 67 of the smoke shops visited. One store had installed a locking system that forced customers to be buzzed in (and out) of the premises. Others had hazardous electrical systems and hidden panels used to store money and/or illegal goods and guns.
- Illegal tobacco products were for sale at all but four of the stores visited.
- A majority of the stores — 79% — were found with illegal cannabis, including counterfeit products packaged to look like popular brands such as Cookies or Stiiizy. These products aren’t regulated and are outside the state’s track-and-tracing system.
- Gambling at some stores, specifically video gambling tables and machines.

Violators were cited and, more importantly, product was seized by authorities. At a single smoke shop on Blackstone Avenue, nearly \$80,000 worth of illegal cannabis and more than \$90,000 in illegal tobacco was seized.

“I would call the program a success,” City Attorney Andrew Janz said during the council meeting.

Janz in August 2023 led the effort for Fresno [to become the first city in California](#) to take part in the Cannabis Administrative Prosecutor Program, which targets black-

market sales as a public nuisance and land-use issue, using local code enforcement in conjunction with police, fire and other state departments.

Since the inspections began, 14 smoke shops have closed in Fresno.

Others are looking to rebrand as mini-markets or clothing stores. At least one, Sal's Smoke Shop, was able to rebrand with the city as Sal's Market, though it continues to operation of portion of the store as a "full-on smoke shop," according to Chief Assistant City Attorney Erica Camarena.

"His ability to rebrand that way is very concerning," she said.

"He did that conveniently so that he could avoid the upcoming ordinance that we are working on."

Revising the smoke shop ordinance

Even with the support of the state and the efforts of the CAPP program, the city's current code doesn't do enough to hold these business accountable, Arias said. Fines for code violations are currently capped at \$250 and nearly all have been appealed. Those appeals can take up to a year.

Arias compared this with one of the smoke shops mentioned in the update, which admitted to making more than \$6,000 a month from its gambling operation.

"That's not a deterrent," Arias said.

A revised version of the smoke shop ordinance is currently being circulated.

It will significantly increase fines for both the businesses and property owners, Arias said. It would also put restrictions on the sale of businesses and narrowly define what could be sold inside the shops, "to beat the work-around," Arias said.

Shops would be required to apply for and obtain a conditional use permit and the policy would set the number of smoke shops allowed in each district at five.

Any business that has been fined previously would be disqualified.

The revised smoke shop ordinance is expected to go before the planning commission and be voted on by the full council in December.

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