

STOCKTON

Stockton police to crack down on tobacco retailers

Some activists are calling for more regulations for tobacco retailers.



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STOCKTON, Calif. — [Stockton](#) smoke shop owner Fadel Mohamed was double-checking his inventory and second-guessing his business venture Sunday.

"The feeling is kind of sad... just waiting for what's going to happen," said Mohamed who opened his business, 'Smoke Dungeon' about a year ago. "We cannot sell. (We're) afraid to get a ticket."

Fadel said his doors may not be able to stay open much longer, and soon, it could be Stockton police inspectors walking through them.

"What that inspector will do is go out to these establishments and really conduct the compliance of making sure that they're following all the regulations," said Stockton Police Department Public Information Officer David Scott. "Any violations can be addressed appropriately with fines and up to revocation of that tobacco retailing license."

Scott didn't disclose when the inspections will start, but he said that inspectors will have "zero tolerance." They'll be checking for compliance with state laws including ones banning the sale of flavored-tobacco products and city codes, including those that prevent blight.

According to city records, there are at least 130 licensed tobacco retailers in Stockton. Police also plan to stop unlicensed shops.

The enforcement effort comes nearly two years after city councilmembers passed an ordinance placing stricter regulations on smoke shops and requiring them to get a new, special license. Since then, some exemptions have been added and activists have called for more to be done.

"There's absolutely too many," said community activist Mary Elizabeth. "Some neighborhoods in our community here have to suffer from the harms and coming up with some ways to avoid that is to not allow the transfer of a license."

Elizabeth has also called for better data on the concentration of smoke shops in neighborhoods to be available to the public. She plans to speak at Monday evening's Environmental and Legislation Committee meeting where councilmembers will hear an update on recent ordinances that have been passed related to tobacco retailers.

Smoke shop owners warn any more regulations could put people out of work.

"We start going down too, we start losing, not making business. The business is not enough to cover everything," Mohamed said. "I hope they give us time and a chance."

With police inspectors slated to start their work soon, Mohamed hopes that education will happen before enforcement. He also hopes that law enforcement will go after wholesale tobacco product suppliers instead of small businesses.

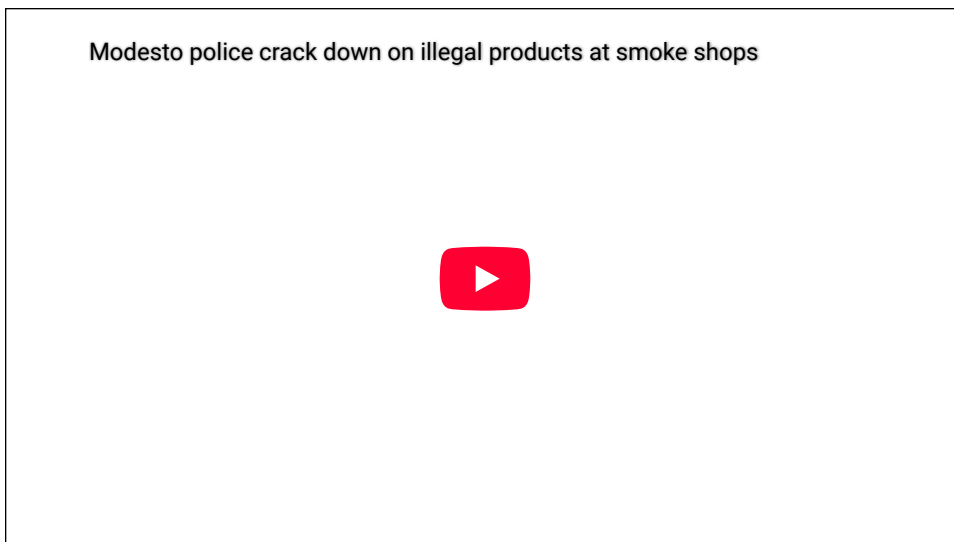
"It's the safety of our youth and that's our primary concern when it comes to these establishments," Scott said. "But it's a team effort and we need everybody to be on the same page and on board."

On Facebook, Stockton Mayor Christina Fugazi said businesses without the proper permits and licensing will be shut down along with businesses not following the flavored-tobacco ban, selling to minors and not having a clear line of sight into the building.

"The bottom line is that our kids are NOT for SALE. Our residential neighborhoods and areas around schools are NOT a place for these types of businesses. We deserve better," Fugazi said.

(Editor's Note: This article has been corrected to clarify that Mayor Fugazi will focus on businesses without the proper permits.)

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