

FRESNO CITY COUNCIL

# City of Fresno cracking down on smoke shops



By [Tiffany Olin](#)

Friday, March 1, 2024



24/7 Live

59°



The Fresno City Council is moving forward on a proposed ordinance to crack down on unregulated smoke shops across the city.

FRESNO, Calif. (KFSN) -- The Fresno City Council is moving forward on a proposed ordinance to crack down on unregulated smoke shops across the city.

City councilmembers Miguel Arias and Nelson Esparza along with city attorney Andrew Janz gathered today to talk about the issue.

They say there are too many smoke shops in the city.

"It's more than 640 establishments that sell tobacco in our city. Additionally, about 125 licensed smoke shops plus hundreds of additional smoke shops that are not licensed," city councilmember Miguel Arias explained.

Code enforcement teams from the city of Fresno and state Attorney General Rob Bonta inspected 31 smoke shops in Fresno-of those 96% were violating city and state laws.



"The smoke shop industry in Fresno is engaging in widespread illicit activity," Arias said. "The sale of cannabis, vaping products to minors, gambling and city code violations that threaten the health and safety of our neighborhoods."

During the inspections, the city collected any illegal inventory and sometimes weapons.

Among the smoke shops inspected, Shakalala Smoke Shop on Van Ness and Belmont in the tower district. The city says they found several violations there. Action News asked the shop for comment but they declined our request for an interview.

The president of the California Association of Retail Tobacconists, Charles Janigian, says there should be consequences for smoke shops breaking the law.

"If they're operating illegally - if and that's a big if-and they do not have a retail tobacco license from the state of California, they should be closed," Janigian said. "If they are attempting to sell marijuana or anything else like that and they do not have the appropriate license, they should be closed."

Fresno city councilmember Miguel Arias said the city can only fine those smoke shops who are operating illegally.

"Even though we are finding weapons, collecting the illegal inventory and finding the business owners, we are not able to shut them down," Arias explained. "That's why we need a citywide policy that allows to shut down these establishments once we catch them with these violations."

The proposed ordinance would require smoke shops to have a conditional use permit, city tobacco retail license, annual inspections, revised hours and more.

However, the city has already stopped issuing permits for new smoke shops.

"To attempt to ban legal operations within Fresno would be a devastating blow to potential hardworking retail operators who want to own a small business," Janigian said.



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The proposed ordinance will continue to be revised before being taken to the planning commission and eventually city council in the spring.

The city will continue its enforcement, collect weapons and illegal inventory, and enforce significant fines in the meantime.

Smoke shops that violate the proposed ordinance will be given time to shut down.

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