National Tobacco Sales to Minors No Longer Declining

The percentage of national tobacco retailers selling to minors appears to have leveled off, according to data from the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration. Since FY97 states have been required under the Synar Amendment to conduct annual random, unannounced inspections of a valid sample of tobacco retailers to ensure that tobacco products are not sold to persons younger than age 18. The average national retailer violation rate* from these inspections decreased from 40.1% in FY97 to 10.8% in FY06. From FY06 to FY09, however, the rate remained stable at around 10.5% (see figure below). According to SAMHSA, this plateau may be the result of decreases in State spending on enforcement of youth tobacco access laws as well as spending on comprehensive tobacco control programs in general.

*The average national retailer violation rate was calculated by weighting each State’s reported retailer violation rate by that State’s population.

NOTES: Tobacco retailer inspection years are in federal fiscal years, which run from 10/1 to 9/30. In FY09, violation rates ranged from 1.6% (North Dakota) to 18.8% (Oregon).