Boston bans cig sales in all retail pharmacies

By ALARIC DEARMENT

BOSTON — Less than half a year after tobacco products sold in San Francisco drug stores went into permanent exile, a major city on the opposite side of the country has enacted a similar ban.

Boston enacted its own ban on Feb. 8. Like their counterparts in San Francisco, Boston’s health officials contended that as a healthcare institution, a pharmacy should not sell products that cause illness.

But Boston’s ban on tobacco sales in pharmacies hasn’t elicited nearly the annoyed response from retail pharmacy chains. Unlike the San Francisco ban, the Boston ban covers all stores that operate pharmacies — including mass merchandisers and supermarkets — rather than drug stores alone.

“A pharmacy is a pharmacy is a pharmacy; it doesn’t matter where it’s located,” Boston Public Health Commission communications director Ann Scales said. “Our interest was in making sure drug stores and pharmacies didn’t sell tobacco products, and to us, that definition applied to grocery stores as well.”

The commission’s definition placated such retail pharmacy chains as Walgreens. “We obviously are complying with the regulations,” Walgreens spokeswoman Vivika Vergara said. “I think the situation is different from the one in San Francisco.”

In the case of San Francisco, Walgreens filed a lawsuit over the city’s ban, alleging that it discriminated against retail pharmacies by exempting grocery stores and mass merchandisers that operate pharmacies.

“We were being equitable, we think, in terms of treating our pharmacies the same,” Scales said. “Before that challenge even arose, we were already moving in the direction of including big boxes and grocery stores.”

Despite the similarity between the two laws in effect and timing, Scales said Boston’s ban didn’t draw inspiration from the one in San Francisco. Instead, it was the result of a multi-year campaign by a group of teenagers from one of Boston’s low-income neighborhoods who wanted to reduce exposure to tobacco. “They petitioned the board; the board bought the argument,” Scales said.

So far, the ban has worked, and Scales said that a Feb. 8 to 9 inspection of 73 pharmacies found 100% compliance with the new law.

Comparison of Boston and San Francisco tobacco bans

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date effective:</th>
<th>Oct. 1, 2008</th>
<th>Feb. 8, 2009</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reasoning:</td>
<td>Pharmacies are healthcare institutions and should not sell unhealthy products; selling healthcare products and tobacco sends mixed messages to consumers.</td>
<td>Pharmacies are healthcare institutions and should not sell unhealthy products; a group of teens in a low-income neighborhood also pushed for the law, seeking to reduce use of tobacco among residents.</td>
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<td>Coverage:</td>
<td>Drug stores only</td>
<td>All retailers that operate pharmacies, as well as college campuses; also includes additional bans on smoking in public places</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opposition:</td>
<td>Opposed by NACDS and retail pharmacy chains</td>
<td>Opposed by NACDS, but not by retail pharmacy chains</td>
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Drug Store News

CHANDLER, Ariz. — Shopper behaviors being shaped out of economic necessity today may be casting the mold for shopping behaviors tomorrow, noted Steve Johnson, EVP health care and personal care client solutions for Information Resources Inc., during a presentation at the National Association of Chain Drug Stores annual meeting.

According to a new National Association of Chain Drug Stores survey, shoppers are eating and buying their groceries more frequently and going to the doctor’s office less, Johnson said. Already, 83% of consumers have reported that they are eating for nutrition, and 81% are relying on maintaining a healthy lifestyle in order to minimize medical expenses.

“[But] in these cases, we are seeing increased prevalence of self-treatment and self-medication.”