

06.01.26

Dear Retailer,

This year marks a historic shift in public health: the government will soon pass a law preventing the sale of tobacco to anyone born on or after 1 January 2009. Over time, this will phase out tobacco sales entirely – a change that some see as a challenge, but we believe is a real opportunity for your business.

Why this matters for you

Tobacco is not your most profitable product. Margins on cigarettes average just 8.5%, compared to around 37% for vape products – four times higher profits for you and far less harmful to your customers. Tobacco also ties up stock space, compliance costs, and staff time, while delivering poor returns compared to other categories. Meanwhile, smokers spend an estimated £2,300 a year on tobacco. Imagine that spending redirected to other products in your store – benefiting you, your customers, and the wider economy.

Addressing concerns

I know that illegal tobacco is a concern for many. Some of you will have seen these sales in your community and others will have seen newspaper headlines. While this remains an issue, the reality is that smoking rates are falling and smokers are consuming less, that is the main driver for falling sales. It is also true that the most effective way to end illicit trade is to end demand altogether. This change will help achieve that in turn strengthening local economies and supporting legitimate retailers.

What will change for you?

The practical steps are simple for the new age of sale law:

- Update age-of-sale signage at the appropriate time to reflect the fixed date: 1 January 2009.
- Train staff to check this date when verifying ID. If you use Challenge 25 continue doing so.

That's it. Tobacco companies claim this will burden retailers, but the numbers tell a different story. Our data suggests there will be very few additional underage attempts and the evidence from rising age of sale elsewhere is that youth smoking drops dramatically.

A healthier future and a stronger business

This is about more than compliance. Something we know retailers understand. When we conducted an independent survey in 2024 half (51%) backed legislation and only a quarter (26%) opposed.

We believe that retailers support this because they understand that tobacco isn't critical to their business and their want to live in communities that are healthy and where children are protected from ever starting a lethal addiction to tobacco.

If you would like to receive updates and support as the Tobacco and Vapes Bill takes effect, then please sign up here: <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/TK7GDSW>
Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Hazel Cheeseman', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Hazel Cheeseman
Chief Executive
Action on Smoking and Health