

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

How do I apply for the California Decoy program?

First you will need to fill out the application and submit a copy of your California ID (or Drivers License). If you need a California ID, visit any Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to apply for one. When you go to the DMV, you will need your a) **ORIGINAL** birth certificate b) Social Security number c) proof of residence and d) \$39. Once enrolled in the program, we will reimburse you the cost of obtaining the California ID. **Send completed applications and DMV receipts to the California Decoy Program, 540 N. Augusta, Fresno, CA 93701.** (Applications must be sent via mail because we need original signatures from you and your parent or guardian).

What are the rewards for being an undercover decoy?

Receive a FREE \$50 gift card after completion of enrollment! When you conduct enforcement operations, you will receive \$10 per store visited whether you are sold tobacco or not. On average a decoy will visit 15-20 stores per outing. When you work, you will be issued a \$10 food coupon after the last store is visited. We also issue all our decoys a letter of recommendation for volunteering with the California Decoy Program.

How often will I work?

You may or may not be called upon to participate. Office of Youth Tobacco Enforcement (OYTE) investigators conduct enforcement operations in each county, but they do not visit each county every year. On average, you'll visit 15-20 stores in one day, but there are decoys who participate with fewer stores depending on the city and the number of retailers available.

Do I have to dress up a certain way when I work?

No, be yourself. We are not trying to trick anyone. Dress in an age appropriate manner. We expect that stores check your ID as required by law and refuse to sell to you.

How do I know when I'm working? Who picks me up?

The OYTE investigators schedule all decoy volunteers by phone, text and or email. They usually will contact you a couple of weeks in advance to schedule your session. It is very important that you are quick to reply to them. If texting is your preferred method of communication, please express that to us in your application. *It is very important that you are quick to reply to them, even if you are unable to work at that date so the officer knows you are still interested.* The compliance checks are carried out year-round. The OYTE investigators will pick you up from home or school, train you, always accompany you to all stores and then drop you off at home once the compliance checks are complete.

Where will you take me when I work?

Any store in the state that sells tobacco products is eligible for a compliance check, such as liquor stores, grocery stores, smoke shops, etc. To complete these compliance checks, you will most likely work outside your own neighborhood, for example, in other cities and/or neighboring counties.

Where do you find volunteers?

We recruit through our website, ads in campuses, newspapers, videos, health fairs, coalitions, school presentations, recommended friends, after-school programs and many non-profit organizations.

Is the program dangerous?

There is slight risk with any compliance check however the OYTE has successfully completed over 185,000 compliance checks with no incidents or injury since 1995. Similarly, the California Decoy Program has reported no incidents since its inception over 20 years ago.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

What happens if a store sells me a tobacco product? Do they get fined?

If a store sells tobacco to you, you will give the product to the investigator once back in the vehicle. At this time, you will hand over to the investigator the tobacco merchandise, change and receipt (if given one). Fines are issued days after you were at the store and no one will know that you participated in the compliance check. The protection of your identity is crucial for the success of this program. Fines vary per offense, from \$400-\$600 for the first violation and up to \$6,000 for subsequent violations.

Can I get in trouble if a store tries to go to court over the fine?

No, participants of this program have full immunity from prosecution. In the 20-year history of the program, no decoy has had to go to court to provide testimony. Although a decoy has not had to participate in a trial or courtroom, we cannot promise that the decoy will not be called to testify in a case. All enrolled decoys must be available for up to five years from the date of the decoy's last compliance check to provide a narrative report, declaration, and/or give oral testimony in a hearing should one of their compliance checks go to court or administrative hearing.

I live in a small community. What if someone recognizes me?

The Office of Youth Tobacco Enforcement (OYTE) investigators are highly motivated to protect your identity and will not have you visit stores in your immediate community. Rather, they may determine it is safest to take you into a bordering city or county to protect your identity.

I did this once for the health department. How is this program different?

The compliance checks you may have participated in with your local health department are completely different than the "undercover" compliance checks for this program. The undercover tobacco compliance checks conducted by the OYTE investigators are mandated by the state and federally, such as the Stop Tobacco Access to Kids Enforcement Act (S.T.A.K.E. Act) passed in 1994 and the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act signed into law in 2009.

What if I sign up and I never get called for work? Why should I join?

Even if you don't get the opportunity to work, you will still receive many complementary incentives up to \$50.00. We will pay for your California ID (a \$39 value) if you complete the application process. You will also receive on your 17th birthday a letter of recommendation from the California Decoy Program.

What is a 1099-MISC form?

A 1099-MISC form is used to report miscellaneous income (sometimes called "non-employee income") to the IRS. It is also used to give information on income to the recipients, so they can complete their income tax returns. Decoy volunteers who earn \$600 or more in a calendar year will automatically be issued a 1099-MISC tax form.

Why did I receive a 1099-MISC form?

If our office issues you a 1099-MISC, it is because you earned \$600 or more in the calendar year. The IRS requires that we obtain a social security number prior to issuing the 1099-MISC. We will never require social security information at the time of enrollment. However, only and if a decoy earns \$600 or more in the calendar year, we will be required to contact our decoys and/or their parents to obtain their social security number.