



LIVING TOBACCO RETAILER MAP: An Interactive Activity to Visualize Density

This activity can be used as a companion “next step” to CounterTobacco.org activities “[Walking Tobacco Audit](#)” and “[Tobacco Retailer Nation](#).” After collecting data through one or both of these two activities, you can share your findings with stakeholders and local decision-makers to impact policy change. Use this human retailer map activity template as written or as inspiration to create your own policy action.

Objective:

- Organize a creative visual display to illustrate the burden of tobacco retailer density in your community and provide evidence to your local government stakeholders to urge them to make policy change that reduces the burden of retail tobacco in your community.

Age range: 13-18 (high school)

Estimated cost:

- Craft materials: \$75
- Printing: \$15

Estimated prep time: 8-12 weeks, depending on how frequently your group meets. If you have not yet completed either “Walking Tobacco Audit” or “Tobacco Retailer Nation” or a similar activity, extra time may be needed.

Participants: 10-15 students, 1-2 teachers/coordinators

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Introduction:

Tobacco is the leading cause of preventable death and disease worldwide.¹ A variety of tobacco products are legally sold near parks, schools, playgrounds, and other places youth visit often.²

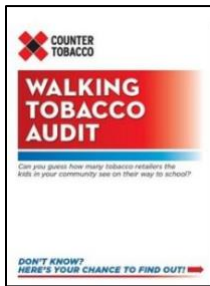
A study published in *Preventive Medicine* found that when there are more tobacco retailers in a school neighborhood, there are higher rates of youth smoking in the school³ The tobacco industry is also aware that most people start smoking before they graduate high school.⁴

“Tobacco retailer density” is a measure of the number of tobacco retailers in a community. It is usually measured as X number of retailers per 1,000 people. When there are more tobacco retailers located in a given area, youth in that area are more likely to start smoking, current smokers consume more, and it is harder for people to quit. ^{3, 8, 9}

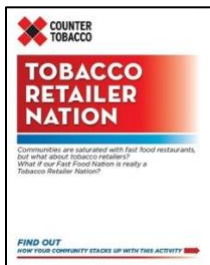
Take your findings about tobacco retailer density in your community and make the statistics come alive by creating a LIVING TOBACCO RETAILER MAP at your local government council and promote retailer reduction policy solutions.

PART 1: EVALUATE THE PROBLEM IN YOUR COMMUNITY

Conduct a Countertobacco.org activity:



WALKING TOBACCO AUDIT: A walking tobacco audit offers youth a chance to see how many tobacco retailers and how many tobacco advertisements are located along their route to school. Participants identify the number of tobacco retailers along the major routes to school and tally the tobacco product names, brands, and prices that can be seen from outside those stores.



TOBACCO RETAILER NATION: Tobacco control advocates map tobacco retailers and fast food restaurants in their community. This activity helps show the density of tobacco retailers--the number of outlets selling tobacco for a given geographic location or population size compared with fast food restaurant density. This exercise can create a compelling argument and visual evidence to limit the number of tobacco retailers; for example, nationally, there are about 30 tobacco retailers for every one McDonalds.

PART 2: MAP YOUR COMMUNITY

Assess the data you have collected and look for any patterns in your data. We recommend you choose one of the strategies below and pair it with a policy approach. That way, you can illustrate the current situation in your town and compare it to the improved situation that you are asking your local government to implement.

- **Disparities approach:** Tobacco retailers are often not equitably distributed across our communities. Research has found higher tobacco retailer density in poor and minority neighborhoods compared with higher-income and white neighborhoods.^{5 6} This creates a disparity between neighborhoods. Examine your data and determine whether the patterns in density are determined by racial or economic differences in your area.

- **School based approach:** Look at the areas surrounding your elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools. Are there tobacco retailers located close by? As stated above, having tobacco retailers located near a school could lead to increased smoking initiation. In addition to opportunities for youth access to tobacco products, this also creates more exposure to tobacco advertising among youth, which is linked to greater youth initiation as well.⁷ Sharing these facts can help to strengthen your case for a school-based policy.
- **Cool hangouts approach:** Identify all of the favorite youth hang-outs in your community. These may be coffee shops, libraries, movie theaters, the mall, or whatever place teens in your area like to go in their free time. Identify tobacco retailers near those places and use this approach for your demonstration.
- **Fast food approach:** In some towns or cities, fast food has a large presence. Unlike fast food chains, tobacco retailers come in all shapes and sizes and have different store names. Tobacco retailers sell products ranging from medicine, to fruits and vegetables, to gasoline. This makes tobacco retailers particularly pervasive in communities. Demonstrate the density of tobacco retailers by creating your own living map in a skit format at your local government’s public meeting. Get creative—you can use an “Arch” or red/yellow costumes to symbolize McDonalds, and cigarette templates or even a person dressed in a costume with candy wrappers and tobacco branding to symbolize retailers (illustrating how these seemingly “normal” stores can make tobacco products alluring and accessible for a teen).

PART 3: IDENTIFY A POLICY SOLUTION

Now that you’ve demonstrated the reality of the situation, show your policymakers what it would be like if you implemented one of the below policy solutions to reduce youth access to tobacco products. Determine which facts are the most interesting and relevant to your policy makers, and choose the most compelling facts to create your visual display!

Policy solutions:

- **Restrict all tobacco sales near schools:** Exposure to tobacco retailers near schools may influence youth smoking.³ Research has found disproportionate numbers of tobacco retailers located near schools with more low income, African-American, and Hispanic students.^{5,6} Decreasing or restricting tobacco retailers near schools is one strategy to help prevent youth from starting to use tobacco products and may also help reduce disparities in tobacco retailer density.⁵
- **Restrict flavored tobacco sales near schools:** A number of municipalities around the country have prohibited the sale of flavored tobacco products within a certain distance (e.g. 500ft, 600ft, 1000ft) of schools. The majority of youth who use tobacco initiate use with a flavored product,¹⁰ so eliminating the sale of flavored products near schools could lead to fewer youth who try tobacco or become regular tobacco users. [Learn more about flavored tobacco products here.](#)

- **Licensing/zoning for tobacco retailers:** To drive a car, you have to get a license. Many cities and states also require licenses for a wide variety of retailers, for everything from selling alcohol or selling Christmas trees. However, not all states or cities require a license to sell tobacco. Tobacco retailer licensing allows for better monitoring of stores in your area and can serve as a way to fund compliance programs. Tobacco retail licensing laws can also serve as a regulatory platform for other point-of-sale tobacco laws, such as restrictions on the sale of flavored tobacco products. Through licensing, limits can be set on the type of store that can hold a tobacco license, where stores can be located, and how many of them there can be in a given area. Similarly, zoning policies like conditional use permits can restrict where tobacco retailers can locate, limiting their presence in residential areas or near schools. [Learn more about licensing and zoning here.](#)
- [Find additional point-of-sale policy solutions here](#)

PART 4: Assemble Team

Take your findings to your town/city/county council and speak up about the amount of tobacco retailers in your community.

To start, you should recruit talent. You can pull from students in the drama club, in a tobacco-related club, or a debate organization. Here are some of the roles you should plan to fill:

“Cast list”

- **Narrator (1):** This person should be good at public speaking and telling stories. They will narrate the scene as the other students act out the different scenarios.
- **Fast food retailers (2+):** Print out the logos of the fast food chains in your area and make them into signs to help your council members visualize their locations.
- **Tobacco retailers (2+):** Get creative with depicting tobacco retailers. You can wear a scary mask, pin tobacco branding and candy wrappers to your regular clothes, or use other visual items that the tobacco retailers in your area sell to make a costume, making it clear what role you are playing.
- **Vape shops (1+):** This person can use a vape shop’s logo or a sign that says “Vape Shop.”
- **Schools (1+):** Dress as the mascot or in your school colors to symbolize the school, holding a sign/symbol of your school.
- **“Child walking to school” (1):** Wear a backpack and your school uniform if you have one. You may want to include a student’s personal narrative of experiencing tobacco retailers’ presence on their way to school.

Example props:

- Faux street signs
- Printed logos and paint stirrers to make signs
- School uniform/icon/mascots
- Cut outs of a school
- Symbol for tobacco retailer

PART 5: SKIT PREPARATION

1. Do your research to identify which policy solution makes the most sense for the tobacco retailer density problem your community faces.
2. Based on your findings, determine how you will display point-of-sale scenarios. Use one of the frameworks listed above (disparities, schools, cool hang out spots, fast food) or another approach relevant to your community. Work with the resources you have (budget, participants, space, and time) to choose which approach will speak to your problem. Here are some potential options:
 - a. *Disparities approach*: Show the difference between neighborhoods of different racial or economic backgrounds (2+ scenes)
 - b. *Cool hang outs/school*:
 - Scene 1: Show the current situation with the number of tobacco retailers, their proximity to a school/hang out spot.
 - Scene 2: Show what the street would look like if the desired policy change were in effect.
 - c. *Fast Food*: Show how many tobacco retailers there are in your community in comparison to a popular fast food establishment.
3. Contact your city/town/county council and determine a time for your meeting to take place. When contacting them, find out their operating procedure and whether there are time limits. If so, you can ask for them to waive the time limit for your presentation. You may also consider whether there is space for a skit where the council usually meets. If not, invite the council members to a different space for the presentation. For either location, try to view the space beforehand so that you can determine where your “stage” would be best positioned.
4. Assign roles and decide on your costumes and props.
5. Write a script. Have each member of your team take ownership over their lines and give feedback to each other. Aim to highlight some of the major key findings from your community, adding those points to the national data available on CounterTobacco.org. Keep in mind the time limits, if any.
6. Create your props—creative props can be a great way to engage media and interest the stakeholders in your presentation.

7. Practice!
8. Optional: [Promote your event to the media](#): Find resources on contacting the media, messaging, and tips on talking to the media [on the Kick Butts Day website](#).

PART 6: DAY OF

1. Arrive at the meeting early to set up.
2. The narrator should introduce the group and present some basic facts you found during your data collection on tobacco retailer density in your town.
3. Then your “living map” can form, as the narrator discusses how widespread tobacco retailers are in your community, acting out a child’s walk to school.
4. Conclude with an “ask” to take action, emphasizing that the council has the authority to make a policy.*
5. Leave behind resources and information on the problem in your community and the policy solution you are proposing addresses the problem for decision makers to review.

***Note:** You can learn more about how to know if your local government has the authority to pass policy restricting tobacco retailer locations or tobacco sales, and if not, find alternative options on how to take action instead here: <https://countertobacco.org/preemption>.

RESOURCES:

- Infographic: [How to reduce tobacco retailer density and why](#)
- Sample policies:
 - [Berkeley, CA](#) – Ban on selling flavored tobacco products, including menthol cigarettes within 600ft of K-12 schools
 - [Chicago, IL](#) – Ban on selling flavored tobacco products, including menthol cigarettes, within 500ft of high schools
 - [Santa Clara County, CA](#) – Ban on new tobacco retailers within 1,000 feet of a school or 500 feet of another retailer.
 - [San Francisco, CA](#) – Limits the total number of tobacco retailers within each district, within 500ft of a school, or within 500ft of another existing retailer.
 - [Philadelphia, PA](#) - Limits the density of tobacco retailers within each district and within 500ft of K-12 schools.
 - Minnesota model tobacco retailer licensing language for [cities](#) and for [counties](#).
- ChangeLab Solution’s [Tobacco Retailer Licensing Playbook](#) and other [Tobacco Retailer Licensing resources](#)
- More ways to engage youth in point-of-sale tobacco control:
 - Find more [Youth and Community Engagement Activities](#)
 - Participate in CounterTobacco.org’s [annual photo contest](#)

- To find out what tobacco retailers in your stores are selling and how products are being marketed, consider [conducting store assessments](#).
- Write editorials for the local newspaper
 - i. [Letter to the Editor Template](#) – Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids
 - ii. Write [letters to council members](#) for support

FEEDBACK

Provide feedback on this beta activity by filling out the following two forms and e-mailing them to info@countertobacco.org:

- For the activity coordinator: [Coordinator Feedback Form](#)
- For all participating youth: [Youth Feedback Form](#)

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