

Article 39.

Protection of Minors.

**§ 14-313. Youth access to tobacco products, alternative nicotine products, vapor products, and cigarette wrapping papers.**

(a) Definitions. – The following definitions apply in this section:

- (1) Alternative nicotine product. – Any noncombustible product that contains nicotine, whether natural or synthetic, but does not contain tobacco and is intended for human consumption whether chewed, absorbed, dissolved, ingested, or by other means. This term does not include a vapor product or any product regulated by the United States Food and Drug Administration under Chapter V of the federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act.
- (1a) Consumable product. – Consumable product shall have the same meaning as provided in G.S. 105-113.4(1k). For purposes of this section, a consumable product does not contain any tobacco leaf.
- (1b) Distribute. – To sell, furnish, give, or provide tobacco products, including tobacco product samples or cigarette wrapping papers, to the ultimate consumer.
- (1c) FDA. – Food and Drug Administration.
- (2) Proof of age. – A drivers license or other photographic identification that includes the bearer's date of birth that purports to establish that the person is 18 years of age or older.
- (3) Sample. – A tobacco product distributed to members of the general public at no cost for the purpose of promoting the product.
- (3a) Repealed by Session Laws 2024-31, s. 2(a), effective December 1, 2024.
- (3b) Secretary. – The Secretary of the Department of Revenue.
- (3c) Timely Filed Premarket Tobacco Product Application. – An application pursuant to 21 U.S.C. § 387j for a vapor product or consumable product containing nicotine derived from tobacco marketed in the United States as of August 8, 2016, that was submitted to the United States Food and Drug Administration on or before September 9, 2020, and accepted for filing.
- (4) Tobacco product. – Any product that contains tobacco and is intended for human consumption. For purposes of this section, the term includes an alternative nicotine product, vapor product, consumable product, or components of a vapor product.
- (5) Vapor product. – Any noncombustible product that employs a mechanical heating element, battery, or electronic circuit regardless of shape or size and that can be used to heat a consumable product. The term includes an electronic cigarette, electronic cigar, electronic cigarillo, and electronic pipe. The term does not include any product regulated by the United States Food and Drug Administration under Chapter V of the federal Food, Drug, and Cosmetic Act.

(b) Sale or Distribution to Persons Under the Age of 18 Years. – If any person shall distribute, or aid, assist, or abet any other person in distributing tobacco products or cigarette wrapping papers to any person under the age of 18 years, or if any person shall purchase tobacco products or cigarette wrapping papers on behalf of a person under the age of 18 years, the person shall be guilty of a Class 2 misdemeanor; provided, however, that it shall not be unlawful to distribute tobacco products or cigarette wrapping papers to an employee when required in the performance of the employee's duties. Retail distributors of tobacco products shall prominently display near the point of sale a sign in letters at least five-eighths of an inch high which states the following:

N.C. LAW STRICTLY PROHIBITS  
THE PURCHASE OF TOBACCO PRODUCTS, ALTERNATIVE NICOTINE PRODUCTS,  
VAPOR PRODUCTS, AND CIGARETTE WRAPPING PAPERS  
BY PERSONS UNDER THE AGE OF 18.  
PROOF OF AGE REQUIRED.

Failure to post the required sign shall be an infraction punishable by a fine of twenty-five dollars (\$25.00) for the first offense and seventy-five dollars (\$75.00) for each succeeding offense.

A person engaged in the sale of tobacco products or cigarette wrapping papers shall demand proof of age from a prospective purchaser if the person has reasonable grounds to believe that the prospective purchaser is under 18 years of age. Failure to demand proof of age as required by this subsection is a Class 2 misdemeanor if in fact the prospective purchaser is under 18 years of age. Retail distributors of tobacco products or cigarette wrapping papers shall train their sales employees in the requirements of this law. Proof of any of the following shall be a defense to any action brought under this subsection:

- (1) The defendant demanded, was shown, and reasonably relied upon proof of age in the case of a retailer, or any other documentary or written evidence of age in the case of a nonretailer.
- (2) The defendant relied on the electronic system established and operated by the Division of Motor Vehicles pursuant to G.S. 20-37.02.
- (3) The defendant relied on a biometric identification system that demonstrated (i) the purchaser's age to be at least the required age for the purchase and (ii) the purchaser had previously registered with the seller or seller's agent a drivers license, a special identification card issued under G.S. 20-37.7, a military identification card, or a passport showing the purchaser's date of birth and bearing a physical description of the person named on the card.

(b1) Distribution of Tobacco Products. – Tobacco products shall not be distributed in vending machines; provided, however, vending machines distributing tobacco products are permitted (i) in any establishment which is open only to persons 18 years of age and older; or (ii) in any establishment if the vending machine is under the continuous control of the owner or licensee of the premises or an employee thereof and can be operated only upon activation by the owner, licensee, or employee prior to each purchase and the vending machine is not accessible to the public when the establishment is closed. The owner, licensee, or employee shall demand proof of age from a prospective purchaser if the person has reasonable grounds to believe that the prospective purchaser is under 18 years of age. Failure to demand proof of age as required by this subsection is a Class 2 misdemeanor if in fact the prospective purchaser is under 18 years of age. Proof that the defendant demanded, was shown, and reasonably relied upon proof of age shall be a defense to any action brought under this subsection. Any person distributing tobacco products through vending machines in violation of this subsection shall be guilty of a Class 2 misdemeanor.

(b2) Internet Distribution of Tobacco Products. – A person engaged in the distribution of tobacco products through the Internet or other remote sales methods shall perform an age verification through an independent, third-party age verification service that compares information available from public records to the personal information entered by the individual during the ordering process to establish that the individual ordering the tobacco products is 18 years of age or older.

(c) Purchase By Persons Under the Age of 18 Years. – If any person under the age of 18 years purchases or accepts receipt, or attempts to purchase or accept receipt, of tobacco products or cigarette wrapping papers, or presents or offers to any person any purported proof of age which is false, fraudulent, or not actually his or her own, for the purpose of purchasing or receiving any tobacco product or cigarette wrapping papers, the person shall be guilty of a Class 2

misdemeanor; provided, however, that it shall not be unlawful for an employee to purchase or accept receipt of tobacco products or cigarette wrapping papers when required in the performance of the employee's duties.

(d) Sending or Assisting a Person [Less Than] 18 Years to Purchase or Receive Tobacco Products or Cigarette Wrapping Papers. – If any person shall send a person less than 18 years of age to purchase, acquire, receive, or attempt to purchase, acquire, or receive tobacco products or cigarette wrapping papers, or if any person shall aid or abet a person who is less than 18 years of age in purchasing, acquiring, or receiving or attempting to purchase, acquire, or receive tobacco products or cigarette wrapping papers, the person shall be guilty of a Class 2 misdemeanor; provided, however, persons under the age of 18 may be enlisted by police or local sheriffs' departments to test compliance if the testing is under the direct supervision of that law enforcement department and written parental consent is provided; provided further, that the Department of Health and Human Services shall have the authority, pursuant to a written plan prepared by the Secretary of Health and Human Services, to use persons under 18 years of age in annual, random, unannounced inspections, provided that prior written parental consent is given for the involvement of these persons and that the inspections are conducted for the sole purpose of preparing a scientifically and methodologically valid statistical study of the extent of success the State has achieved in reducing the availability of tobacco products to persons under the age of 18, and preparing any report to the extent required by section 1926 of the federal Public Health Service Act (42 USC § 300x-26).

(e) Statewide Uniformity. – It is the intent of the General Assembly to prescribe this uniform system for the regulation of tobacco products and cigarette wrapping papers to ensure the eligibility for and receipt of any federal funds or grants that the State now receives or may receive relating to the provisions of this section. To ensure uniformity, no political subdivisions, boards, or agencies of the State nor any county, city, municipality, municipal corporation, town, township, village, nor any department or agency thereof, may enact ordinances, rules or regulations concerning the sale, distribution, display or promotion of (i) tobacco products or cigarette wrapping papers on or after September 1, 1995, (ii) alternative nicotine products or vapor products on or after August 1, 2013, or (iii) alternative nicotine products on or after December 1, 2024. This subsection does not apply to the regulation of vending machines, nor does it prohibit the Secretary of Revenue from adopting rules with respect to the administration of the tobacco products taxes levied under Article 2A of Chapter 105 of the General Statutes.

(f) Deferred Prosecution or Conditional Discharge. – Notwithstanding G.S. 15A-1341(a1) or G.S. 15A-1341(a4), any person charged with a misdemeanor under this section shall be qualified for deferred prosecution or a conditional discharge pursuant to Article 82 of Chapter 15A of the General Statutes provided the defendant has not previously been placed on probation for a violation of this section and so states under oath.

(g) Certification of Vapor Products and Consumable Products. – As required by Part 3 of Article 4 of Chapter 143B of the General Statutes, the Secretary of the Department of Revenue shall certify vapor products and consumable products eligible for retail sale in this State and shall list them on a directory.

(h) Fines and Civil Penalties. – The following penalties shall apply to violations of the certification requirements for consumable products and vapor products required by Part 3 of Article 4 of Chapter 143B of the General Statutes:

- (1) Retailer, distributor, or wholesaler fines. – A retailer, distributor, or wholesaler who offers for sale a consumable product or vapor product intended for ultimate retail sale in this State that is not included in the directory is subject to a warning with a mandatory reinspection of the retailer within 30 days of the violation of Part 3 of Article 4 of Chapter 143B of the General Statutes. [The following applies:]

- a. For a second violation of this type within a 12-month period, the fine shall be at least five hundred dollars (\$500.00) but not more than seven hundred fifty dollars (\$750.00) and, if licensed, the licensee's license shall be suspended for 30 days.
  - b. For a third or subsequent violation of this type within a 12-month period, the fine shall be at least one thousand dollars (\$1,000) but not more than one thousand five hundred dollars (\$1,500) and, if licensed, the licensee's license shall be revoked.
  - c. Upon a second or subsequent violation of this type, consumable products or vapor products that are not on the directory as required by G.S. 143B-245.12, and are possessed by a retailer, distributor, or wholesaler, shall be subject to seizure, forfeiture, and destruction. The cost of such seizure, forfeiture, and destruction shall be borne by the person from whom the products are confiscated, except that no products may be seized from a consumer who has made a bona fide purchase of such product. The Secretary may store and dispose of the seized products as appropriate, in accordance with federal, State, and local laws pertaining to storage and disposal of such products.
- (2) **Manufacturer penalties.** – A manufacturer whose consumable products or vapor products are not listed in the directory as required by G.S. 143B-245.12, and who causes the products that are not listed to be sold for retail sale in North Carolina, whether directly or through an importer, distributor, wholesaler, retailer, or similar intermediary or intermediaries, is subject to a civil penalty of ten thousand dollars (\$10,000) for each individual product offered for sale in violation of Part 3 of Article 4 of Chapter 143B of the General Statutes until the offending product is removed from the market or until the offending product is properly listed on the directory. In addition, any manufacturer that falsely represents any information required by a certification form shall be guilty of a misdemeanor for each false representation.
- (i) **[State Recovery of Costs. –]** In an action to enforce this section, the State shall be entitled to recover costs, including the costs of investigation, expert witness fees, and reasonable attorney fees.
  - (j) **[Deceptive Trade Practice. –]** A repeated violation of the requirements of Part 3 of Article 4 of Chapter 143B of the General Statutes shall constitute a deceptive trade practice under Chapter 75 of the General Statutes. (1891, c. 276; Rev., s. 3804; C.S., s. 4438; 1969, c. 1224, s. 3; 1991, c. 628, s. 1; 1993, c. 539, s. 216; 1994, Ex. Sess., c. 24, s. 14(c); 1995, c. 241, s. 1; 1997-434, ss. 1-6; 1997-443, s. 11A.118(a); 2001-461, s. 5; 2002-159, s. 5; 2005-350, s. 6(b); 2013-165, s. 1; 2014-119, s. 2(c); 2015-264, s. 4; 2024-31, s. 2(a).)