

Preventing illegal tobacco and alcohol sales to minors through electronic age-verification devices

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Abstract

Efforts to prohibit the sales of tobacco and alcohol products to minors are widespread. Electronic Age Verification (EAV) devices are one possible means to improve compliance with sales to minors laws. The purpose of this study was to evaluate the implementation and effectiveness of EAV devices in terms of the frequency and accuracy of age verification, as well as to examine the impact of EAV's on the retailer environment. Two study locations were selected: Tallahassee, Florida and Iowa City, Iowa. Retail stores were invited to participate in the study, producing a self-selected experimental group. Stores that did not elect to test the EAV's comprised the comparison group. The data sources included: 1) mystery shopper inspections: two pre- and five post-EAV installation mystery shopper inspections of tobacco and alcohol retailers; 2) retail clerk and manager interviews; and 3) customer interviews. The study found that installing EAV devices with minimal training and encouragement did not increase age verification and underage sales refusal. Surveyed clerks reported positive experiences using the electronic ID

readers and customers reported almost no discomfort about being asked to swipe their IDs. Observations from this study support the need for a more comprehensive system for responsible retailing.

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