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***PHOTOS:*** *We Card decal/logo*

 **Gov. Inslee proclaims September ‘We Card Awareness Month’**

*Proclamation highlights important role retailers play in preventing
sales of age-restricted products to minors*

**OLYMPIA** — A new [ceremonial proclamation](https://www.wa-food-ind.org/posts/we-card-awareness-month-proclamation) from Gov. Jay Inslee highlights the important role retailers play in preventing sales of age-restricted products, including tobacco and e-cigarettes, to minors.

 The proclamation declares September as “We Card Awareness Month,” celebrating the 25th anniversary of the education and training program designed to help retailers identify and deny underage youth and adult-for-underage attempts to purchase alcohol, tobacco and vaping products.

New data from the FDA suggests that teen vaping is reaching epidemic levels in the US, doubling in usage between 2018 and 2019 nationwide from about 2 million users to over 5 million. Last fall, Gov. Inslee enacted a temporary ban on the sale of flavored vaping products following a number of vaping-related illnesses and deaths in Washington state.

“Washington grocers, convenience stores and other retailers are on the front lines in the battle to prevent underage sales of age-restricted products,” said Jan Gee, president and CEO of the Washington Food Industry Association. “Since it was first introduced in 1995, the We Card education and training program has been instrumental in giving sales associates the necessary skills to identify and deny alcohol, tobacco and now vaping product sales to underage youth. Our members are proud to participate in the We Card program and are working to prevent the sale of these products to minors.”

Retailers involved in the We Card program have access to education and training for their employees, teaching them how to accurately check for proper identification and how to handle difficult situations that can occur at point-of-sale.

“Retailers want to provide their employees on the front lines with every possible tool to prevent the sale of age-restricted products to minors,” said Renée Sunde, president and CEO of the Washington Retail Association. “The We Card program has been very effective at giving retail employees the confidence to properly identify underage customers and deny purchases. That’s why continuous training, like that provided by We Card is so crucial as we look to keep e-cigarettes and other age-restricted products out of the hands of minors — or those who provide them to minors.”

By declaring September “We Card Awareness Month,” the governor and retailers are looking to raise awareness of the program among consumers and attempt to bend the curve when it comes to teen vaping. Participating retailers have the red, black and yellow We Card materials prominently displayed in stores, at check stands, store doors and windows.

“The simple act of asking for ID can mean the difference in an illegal sale to a minor. Our members take this responsibility very seriously, carding everyone under 30 and asking for proper ID,” said Joe Gilliam, president of the Northwest Grocery Association. “Asking to see ID and walking through the age-verification process can be stressful, but it’s essential if we’re going to prevent sales to underage customers. The We Card program has been an excellent resource for our members over the years. We hope it continues to make a difference and keeps these age-restricted products out of the hands of minors,” he added.

“Any underage sale is unacceptable.”

***About the Washington Food Industry Association****The Washington Food Industry Association (WFIA) is dedicated to promoting and protecting the independent, community-focused grocery and convenience store industry and its suppliers. Founded in 1899, the WFIA represents the state’s independent grocers and convenience stores. Membership includes all levels of the food and beverage distribution industry who collaborate to promote the principles of free enterprise to ensure a vigorous, competitive, economically healthy food industry. The grocery and convenience store industry provides about 50,000 Washington jobs. For more information, visit www.wa-food-ind.org.*

***About the Washington Retail Association*** *As stewards of Washington’s retail experience established in 1987, Olympia-based Washington Retail is the primary advocacy group for retailers of all shapes and sizes across the State of Washington. We represent some 4,000 storefronts statewide, from small independent retailers to national and international chain stores.*

***About the Northwest Grocery Association***

*The Northwest Grocery Association serves as the leading advocate for the grocery retail and supplier industry in Oregon, Washington and Idaho. Collectively our members employ more than 97,000 people at more than 860 locations and represent the retailers, wholesalers, brokers, manufacturers and suppliers that support the Pacific Northwest’s grocery industry.*

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