



RECREATIONAL NITROUS OXIDE

NITROUS OXIDE (NO) RETAIL LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS: HUMBOLDT BAY REGION, CITY OF ARCATA AND CITY OF EUREKA

Recreational nitrous oxide (NO or whippets) use is a significant health and wellness concern in many areas of Humboldt County. In the 2021, “Your Thoughts on Substance Use in Humboldt County” survey, young people and community members highlighted that nitrous oxide misuse and litter should be a priority area for Public Health’s substance use prevention work.

In January 2024, the Board of Supervisors directed the DHHS-Public Health Branch to address retail sales of recreational nitrous oxide through education and policy approaches. In June 2024, Public Health’s Substance Use Prevention program was awarded funding from the Department of Health Care Services Substance Use Block Grant Primary Prevention Services grant to work on recreational nitrous oxide education and prevention activities throughout Humboldt County from 2024 through 2028.

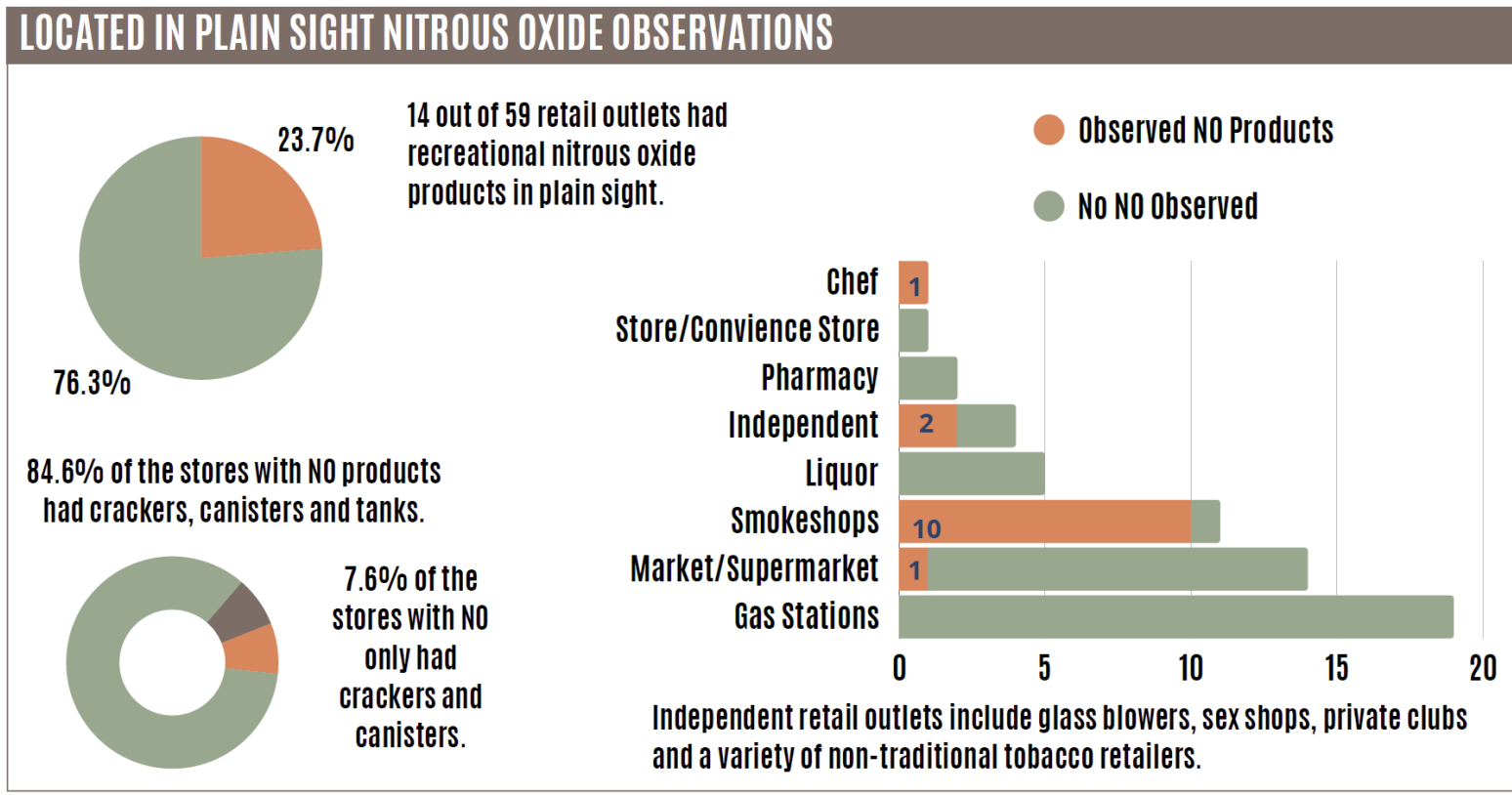


In Humboldt County, it is possible for community members to purchase recreational nitrous oxide products in a residential neighborhood. This mini watermelon nitrous oxide canister was found in a local neighborhood.

DHHS-Public Health’s Substance Use Prevention team conducted a retail landscape analysis from October 2024 through April 2025 to gain an understanding of where recreational nitrous oxide is being sold in the county. The work was focused primarily on tobacco and vaping retail outlets, including smoke shops, and was expanded as needed to independent shops (aka fringe stores) that could also be selling nitrous oxide products. DHHS-Public Health completed 59 visits to retail outlets throughout the Humboldt Bay Region, including the City of Eureka and City of Arcata.

More information about the landscape analysis in other regions of Humboldt County can be found in the “Unincorporated Humboldt County and City of Trinidad” and “Humboldt County Eel River Valley” Nitrous Oxide (NO) Retail Landscape Analysis reports.

A wide variety of NO products and paraphernalia located in plain sight were found at 10 smoke shops in Eureka and Arcata, two independent retail outlets in Arcata, one industrial culinary store and one market in the Eureka area. The independent outlets in Arcata include a glass blowing retailer located within easy walking distance to the Arcata Plaza and a sex shop located in close proximity to Cal Poly Humboldt and campus apartments. Of note, there are three retail outlets within walking distance of the Arcata Plaza. In Eureka, a corner market in a mostly residential neighborhood had nitrous oxide products behind the counter and visible to patrons in a back room.



Retail outlets in both jurisdictions had creative and easily visible ways of displaying the nitrous oxide products, including glass cases on the counter and product packaging attached to the wall behind the cash register. Products observed included cases of “Whip-it” canisters, other canisters, crackers, NO tanks and boxed kits of canisters and crackers. Public Health staff encountered “Whip-It,” “Cream Charger” and “Master Whip” brand NO products. Due to safety concerns, the team did not disclose the observations to the outlets in either jurisdiction, with the exception of one retailer in Arcata who openly expressed frustration about recreational nitrous oxide product sales near their store. Given additional safety considerations in Eureka, the team conducted those observations with support from the Eureka Police Department.

The US Foods CHEF’SSTORE sells Whip-It brand crackers and boxed sets of canisters that are intended for culinary use. These products are only sold to individuals who have the appropriate business license and are more expensive than similar products available from other retailers. This higher pricing is intended to discourage their purchase for recreational use.

For more information about the Substance Use Prevention program, call Public Health’s Healthy Communities Division at 707-268-2132 or visit humboldt.gov/SUP.