



RECREATIONAL NITROUS OXIDE

NITROUS OXIDE (NO) RETAIL LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS: UNINCORPORATED HUMBOLDT COUNTY AND CITY OF TRINIDAD

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.

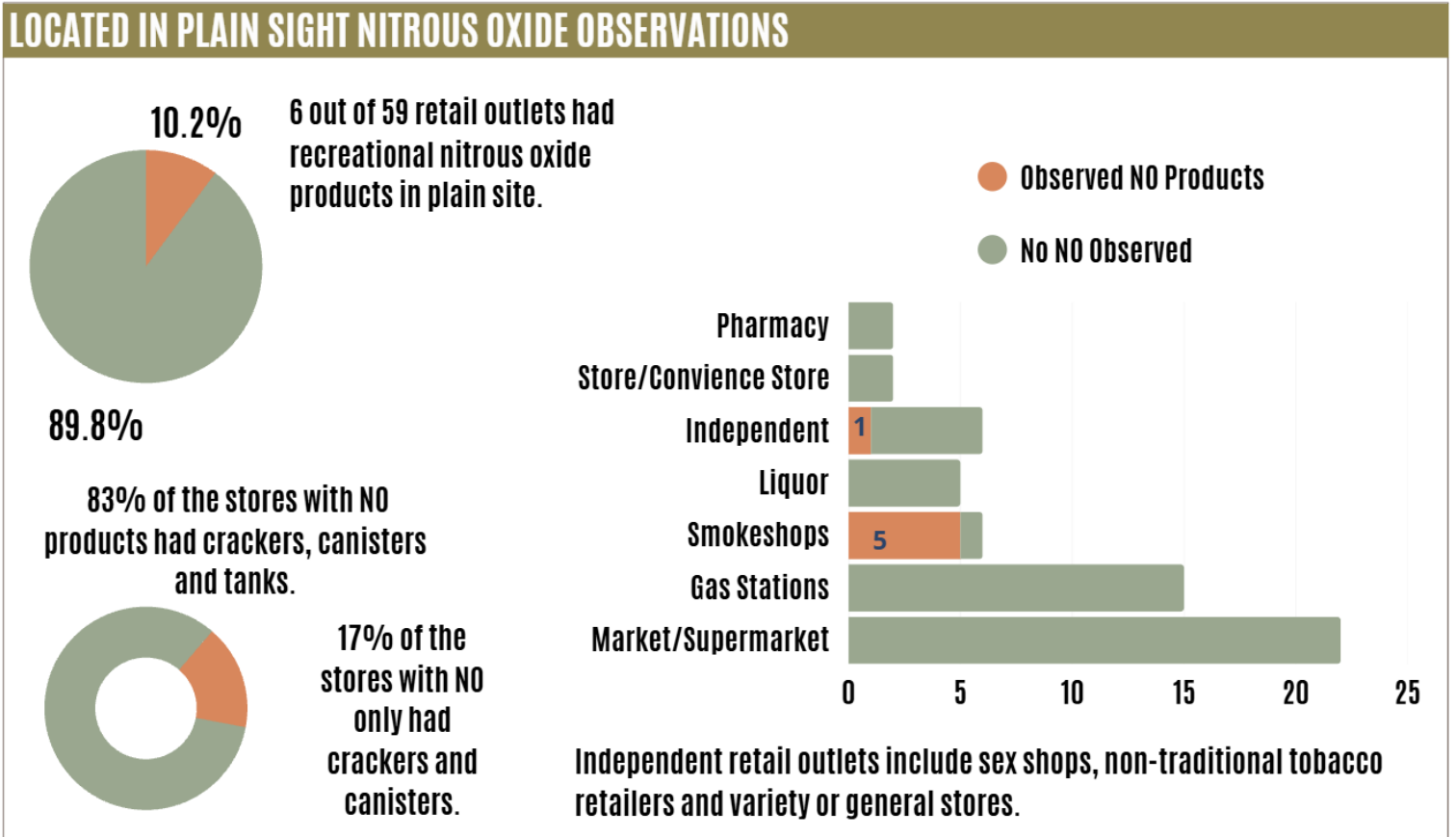


Nitrous oxide “whippet” cannister litter found at the mouth of the Van Duzen River near Alton.

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 at 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 unincorporated Humboldt, including McKinleyville, unincorporated Arcata, unincorporated Eureka, Fields Landing, Scotia, Myers Flat, Miranda, Redway, Loleta, Garberville, Shelter Cove, Honeydew, Dinsmore, Hydesville, Carlotta, Willow Creek, unincorporated Blue Lake, Orick and Piercy and the City of Trinidad.

More information about the landscape analysis in other regions of Humboldt County can be found in the “Humboldt Bay region, City of Arcata and City of Eureka” 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 six smoke shops and non-traditional tobacco retail sites. This includes cases of “Whip-it” canisters, other canisters, crackers, NO tanks and boxed kits of canisters and crackers. NO brand products including “Whip-It,” “Cream Charger,” “Exotic Whip” and “Breaking Bad” were found.



Nitrous oxide was observed at six smoke shops and non-traditional tobacco retail sites throughout unincorporated Humboldt in McKinleyville (three outlets), Garberville (two outlets) and Willow Creek (one outlet). It was not available in plain sight at other retail establishments.

The “located in plain sight” NO observations were disclosed at the majority of the visits in unincorporated Humboldt, due to established relationships with the retailers. Overall, these retailers have been very helpful allies to this work and have provided useful anecdotal information to help guide the work. They expressed that they support this work and recognize recreational NO as a harmful product in our community.

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.