

Smoking program rolls along

By KRISTI FUNDERBURK • Staff Writer • May 13, 2010

VINELAND -- The city's efforts to reduce the number of smokers has hit the road -- and crossed the county line.

The city's mobile unit that serves at-risk populations received grant money to extend its reach to Cape May, Atlantic and Salem counties with some tobacco prevention efforts, said Emma Lopez, health educator for the Vineland Health Department.

"Since we have a mobile unit, some programs are easier if you can take the show on the road essentially and go where the people are," Lopez said.

The Health Department has been addressing tobacco control since 1991 and obtained the recreational vehicle for the mobile program four years ago, Lopez said.

She created the mobile unit when the state threatened to cut funds for the original program. Since that time, the department has accrued 10,000 miles on the RV just servicing Cumberland County.

This fiscal year, Lopez said, the city received \$280,000 -- twice its typical grant amount -- from the state Department of Health and Senior Services to expand its program.

The city has spent most of the past year obtaining local agreements from each county to expand the program, but only recently was able to implement some of its efforts.

Lopez said the outreach team -- which includes her plus one full-time and three part-time employees -- set goals to accomplish in each county. In Atlantic County, the team aims to work on the smoke-free casino initiative.

In Atlantic and Salem counties, members will help migrant farm workers quit smoking. And in Cape May County, they will work with senior citizens and older adults to help them quit.

But the grant expires with the fiscal year on June 30, and Lopez doesn't know if the program will be able to continue. Gov. Chris Christie's budget proposal included cutting the state's tobacco control program funding, she said.

The city is looking for alternate grant opportunities so it can continue its efforts both here and beyond the county, Lopez said.

"Unfortunately, this year is pretty scary," she said. "We're hoping there's a way to keep our money."



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Vineland Health Department employee Ryan Macken (left) discusses the results of an oral carbon monoxide test taken by Howard Thomas of Bridgeton inside of the department's mobile unit. (Staff photo/Charles J. Olson)

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Gabriel Hinckley, 2, of Millville holds a model of a diseased lung at an information table outside of the Vineland Health Department's anti-smoking mobile unit. (Staff photos/Charles J. Olson)



The Vineland Health Department's anti-smoking mobile unit sets up shop last month outside Walmart in Millville.

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