

Standardized Tobacco Assessment for Retail Settings: *Vape Shop*

vSTARS Training Manual

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vSTARS

Training Manual

INTRODUCTION

This manual is intended to provide guidance on how to conduct a standardized audit of vape shops. The purpose of the audit is to assess vape shops and vape products at the point of sale (POS). The following types of variables will be assessed:

- Store demographics and environment
- Types of vape products sold
- Health messaging

We estimate that the store audit will take roughly 10 – 15 minutes.

Checklist

When going to stores to conduct audits, bring the following materials:

- Training manual
- List of stores with their addresses
- Paper store assessments and pencils/pens (unless completing electronically).
- Car phone charger/iPad charger if using maps on phone or iPad
- Letter written on letterhead from your organization describing the purpose and nature of the project (optional but may be helpful to show store owners)

General Instructions

Many vape shops operate on non-traditional retail hours, opening closer to noon and closing later at night. Please check the store hours before conducting store audits. In the winter months when the sun sets early, use your best judgment and conduct audits only if you are in safe surroundings.

- As there is no standardized listing of vape shops, you may choose to create your store list from the below resources:
 - Yelp
 - Google and Google Maps
 - Vapeabout.com
 - Vaporsearchusa.com
 - E-cigarette-store-reviews.com
 - vapestores.com
 - ReferenceUSA
- Safety is paramount. If you do not feel safe conducting the audit, leave the store quickly and reattempt at a later time.
- We encourage you to make comments, especially to note anything unusual about the store, the products, any items described in the training manual, or questions that come up during the audit.
- Under federal law, sales to minors are not allowed. In some locations, minors are prohibited from entering the shop. Please do not ask individuals below the age of 18 to complete vape shop store assessments given possible exposure to e-cigarette aerosols.

Introducing Yourself and Talking with the Clerk

We find it helpful to introduce ourselves to the staff when entering a store to conduct an assessment. If possible, try not to ask the clerk questions if there are other customers in the store in need of assistance. However, there are a few audit questions that may require assistance from the clerk. Often, you may find you are the only person in the shop. Many clerks are eager to share their enthusiasm for vaping with new customers.

Be aware that some stores, particularly corporate chains, have policies that prohibit employees from participating in surveys. Others may ask you to contact the franchise warehouse or store owners before completing an audit. Also, please note that the FDA conducts inspections of tobacco retailers around the country, sometimes using covert officers. Likewise, some local agencies conduct inspections of tobacco retailers (often to assess issues like youth purchase). You may have to clarify that you are not an inspector by carrying some form of professional identification and using a script like the following:

“Hello, my name is _____. I am conducting a project looking at different vaping products that are sold in stores and how they are marketed to customers. I would like to look around for a few minutes if it’s ok with you. I will not get in the way of any of your customers. I am not an inspector, nor do I have any connections to other stores or to the media. Thank you for your help and for letting me visit your store.”

STORE ASSESSMENT ITEMS

Questions #1-5 are self-explanatory, but may be tailored to fit the needs of your store assessment, depending on how you acquired your store audit list and whether you are using ID numbers. Numbering the stores you visit may be helpful when entering data and tracking the order in which you visited stores, particularly if you visit two stores with a similar name.

6. Can you survey this store? [If not, then select an option below and STOP.]

Select “Yes” if you are able to complete the entire store assessment. If you are asked to leave the store before fully completing the form, mark “No, asked to leave before completing survey”. If a store is temporarily closed, select the response “No, store is closed” and note the reopening date in the “Field Notes” section of the form. If the store is permanently closed, you may check “No, store does not exist.” If you have to visit a store twice, please use the vSTARS form that provides the most complete data.

7. Does this store sell vaping products?

This question is designed to help you determine whether you should be using the vSTARS form for your store audit. The vSTARS store assessment was developed specifically for vape shops – you can use it in scenarios where STARS does not capture enough information about vaping products. All questions on this store assessment pertain to stores that carry devices, liquids, or products associated with vaping. These products carry a number of different names, such as “vape products,” “vaping products,” “e-cigarettes,” “electronic smoking products” and “electronic nicotine delivery systems.” Categorizing all the products of interest under just one name is difficult, as not all “electronic nicotine devices” deliver nicotine, not all “e-cigarettes” resemble a cigarette, and “vape products” is a misnomer to individuals who emphasize the differences between “vaping” and “smoking.” For the purposes of this store assessment, we will be using the terms that are most commonly used by the vaping industry and consumers, in hopes of making it easier for auditors to identify products.

STORE DEMOGRAPHICS

8. Is this store best categorized as a...

Vape Shop? A store that sells vape products such as vape pens, tanks, mods, e-juices, e-hookahs, advanced systems and their accompanying components and e-juices/liquids or cartridges. This store may or may not have a vaping lounge or vaping bar included as well.



Vape Kiosk? A free-standing kiosk that sells vape products within a larger structure such as a mall or public outdoor area.






Head shop with vaping products? Retail outlets that sell paraphernalia related to recreational drug use (e.g., bong, glassware, incense), music, countercultural art and home décor. Most head shops have started carrying advanced system vaporizers but carry cig-a-likes and e-liquids less frequently. If you are surveying head shops that sell a full range of tobacco products, you may carefully consider whether vSTARS or the original STARS will best provide the information. Your team should first review their own goals for conducting a store audit, and then review both the vSTARS and original STARS forms to determine which assessment will best meet your needs.



Convenience store with or without gas; pharmacy; beer/wine/liquor store; grocery store/supermarket; mass merchandiser/discount store → use STARS

The original STARS form was designed to assess traditional tobacco retail outlets, as described in the table below. These stores are less likely to carry advanced system vaporizers or a large selection of e-juices and will be best assessed with **STARS**.

<p>Convenience store (with or without gas)</p> 	<p>Convenience stores or food marts primarily engage in selling a limited line of goods that includes milk, bread, soda, and snacks. They may or may not also include gas stations (e.g., diesel fuel, gasohol, gasoline) in combination with convenience store or food mart items. The convenience stores that sell gasoline may also provide automotive repair services.</p>
<p>Drug store/ pharmacy</p> 	<p>Pharmacies and drug stores selling prescription or nonprescription drugs and medicines.</p>
<p>Beer/wine/liquor store</p> 	<p>Retail outlets that sell beer, wine, cider, spirits, and liquor.</p>

Grocery store/supermarket

Supermarkets and grocery stores sell food, such as canned and frozen foods; fresh fruits and vegetables; and fresh and prepared meats, as well as fish and poultry. Included in this industry are delicatessen-type establishments primarily engaged in retailing a general line of food.

Mass merchandiser/discount store

Mass merchandisers include warehouse clubs, superstores, or supercenters primarily engaged in retailing a general line of groceries in combination with general lines of merchandise, such as apparel, furniture, and appliances. Examples: Walmart Supercenters, Sam's Club, Costco. Discount stores sell a wide range of general merchandise at low prices. Examples: Family Dollar, Dollar General, other dollar stores.

Other: _____. If you come across any stores that sell vaping devices that are not already listed on this assessment, please select "Other" and write in the type of store. Some specialty stores (e.g., skateboard shops) may sell vaping products. Proceed with vSTARS if you are interested in assessing the vaping products.

9. Exterior sign stating policy regarding minors entering the store?

This question refers only to signs posted in a place visible to customers (e.g., door, store windows), but it does **not** pertain to signs regarding the minimum age required to make a purchase. Please select the appropriate minimum age required to enter the store, or select "no minimum age posted to enter" if there are no signs that state a minimum age to enter. Likewise, if the store only has signage regarding a minimum age to purchase, please select "no minimum age posted to enter."



10. Does the store sell:

- a. **Alcoholic beverages?** Any liquid designed for human consumption that contains ethanol. Alcoholic beverages include beer, wine, fortified wine, spirits, liquor, and whiskey, as pictured below.



- b. **Marijuana/Cannabis?** Refers to the leaves of the plant containing *delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol*, commonly referred to as THC, which is naturally-occurring in marijuana and currently legal for recreational and/or medical use in several US states. This drug can be administered in various forms, including smoking or vaping as crumbled loose leaves, concentrated oils or waxes, or hash.



- c. **Whipped cream chargers or dispensers (used for whippets)?** Nitrous oxide (N_2O) is an anesthetic inhalant that is most frequently abused by adolescents. Referred to as “laughing gas” when used in dental settings, it is also used in chargers/canisters to make whipped cream (hence the name, “whippet” or “whip-it”). Many head shops carry products to make whipped cream, ranging from entire dispensers to just nitrous oxide chargers.



- d. **Other psychoactive substances (e.g., kratom; synthetic cannabinoids such as K2 “spice,” “herbal incense,” “Scooby Snax”; salvia)?** Psychoactive substances refer to “substances that, when taken in or administered into one's system, affect mental processes, e.g. cognition or affect.” (WHO, 2015:

http://www.who.int/substance_abuse/terminology/psychoactive_substances/en/). For the purposes of this question, it is not necessary to distinguish between the different types of psychoactive substances sold. On the pages that follow is a list of common psychoactive substances that could be found in a head shop.

If you see any of the following products, you can select “YES” to this question.

- **Kratom** is an opioid-like substance that can be found in the form of dried leaves or e-liquid for vaping. The scientific name for this species is *Mitragyna Speciosa*, and it is often marketed as a dietary supplement.



- **K2 “spice” or other synthetic cannabinoids** are a growing number of fabricated, mind-altering chemicals that are sprayed on dried, shredded plant material so they can be smoked (“herbal incense”) or sold as liquids to be vaporized and inhaled in e-cigarettes and other devices (liquid incense). These are often marketed as “herbal incense.” The most popular synthetic cannabinoid is K2 Spice, but there is an ever-increasing list of others, including Joker, Black Mamba, Kush, Scooby Snax, and Kronic. A few of these are depicted below:



- **Salvia** is a hallucinogen derived from the *salvia divinorum* plant that can be chewed, vaporized, or inhaled.



Types of Products Sold

11. Tobacco devices or products sold:

- a. **Cigarettes?** Sold in packs and cartons, common brands include Marlboro, Camel, Newport, Winston, and Pall Mall. Cigarettes can be sold with or without menthol.



- b. **Cigarillos/Little Cigars?** Little Cigars are the same size as cigarettes but typically have a brown wrapper containing tobacco instead of a white paper one. Cigarillos are the informal name for something in between the size of cigarettes and typical large cigars. Sometimes the packs are labeled “cigarillo,” sometimes just “cigar.” They are sold as singles, foil packs, or boxed packs. Some have plastic or wooden tips and many are flavored. Common brands include Swisher Sweets, Black & Mild, Djarum Black Cherry Filtered Cigars, or Cheyenne cigars.



- c. **Large cigars?** Large cigars are usually about the thickness of your thumb and contain at least ½ ounce of rolled tobacco. They are sold as singles, tubes, box packs, or full wooden or cardboard cigar boxes. The packaging will typically say “cigar.” They span a wide range of prices and many are flavored. Below (right) is an image showing a little cigar (top) and a large cigar (bottom), with a cigarette (middle) for comparison.



- d. **Pipe or roll-your-own tobacco?** Pipe or roll-your-own (RYO) tobacco refers to shredded and dried tobacco, often times flavored or sweetened, which is sold in pouches, bags, cans, and jars. It is commonly used as tobacco for pipes or rolled into cigarettes, cigarillos, and cigars.



- e. **Smokeless tobacco products?** This category includes moist snuff (“dip”), dry snuff, chewing tobacco, or snus. Smokeless tobacco is often sold in tins or pouches as shown below. Snus is a spit-free product that consists of small pouches of tobacco. Although dissolvables are no longer on the market, they would fall under this smokeless category as well. Common brands include Grizzly, Copenhagen, Skoal, Redman, General Snus, and Camel Snus.



- f. **Hookah pipes/water pipes?** Pipes used for smoking that allow the smoke to pass over water and cool before being inhaled by the user. Hookah pipes, water pipes, and narghiles may be used as interchangeable terms. These have long hoses attached (single or multiple) with the tobacco placed at the top and heated by burning charcoal. Depending on the needs of your community, some auditors may choose to separate out **bongs** as their own category, which usually do not contain hoses and can only be used by one user at a time (below right). Please note that some clerks will be sensitive to the term “bong,” so you may want to avoid using that word inside stores.



g. Shisha? Loose-leaf, syrupy tobacco mix used in hookah pipes that is often flavored. Common brands are Starbuzz, Fantasia and Al Fakher, as pictured below.



12. Electronic devices sold:

a. Closed systems (cig-a-likes, e-cigarettes, or e-hookah that either use cartridges or do not have a refillable tank)? Closed systems are those that cannot be taken apart, have the tank refilled, or be altered by the user. They can be disposable or rechargeable. Some allow the user to replace cartridges. Most cig-a-likes, pre-filled vape pens, and some e-hookah pens fall into this category. Cig-a-likes are designed with the same size and shape of a conventional cigarette, so that they give the user the look and feel of smoking a cigarette. Many cig-a-likes have a tip that lights up when activated to mimic smoking as closely as possible. Brands include Blu, Green Smoke and V2. One popular pre-filled vape pen that is not designed to look like a cigarette is Juul (below left). Please note that as of July 2016, [all Vuse products](#) are closed cartridge systems that fall into this category.

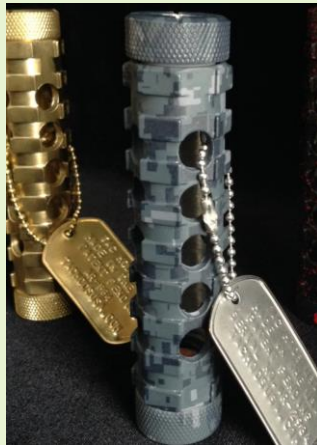


b. Vape pens/eGos/vape sticks, all with a tank to fill with e-juice? This category is the first of two types of devices (see also #12c below) that can be classified as open systems. Unlike #12a, these devices are refillable. Vape pens or sticks emit doses of vapor that may or may not contain nicotine. Devices are often referred to as “vape pens” when shaped as a long cylinder. They cannot be modified or rebuilt. As eGO was the first brand to develop this style of e-cigarette, this is a common brand name that has gradually become a blanket term for similar style devices. **E-hookahs** can be open or closed systems and

may fall into this category of products or into #12a, depending upon whether they can be refilled with e-juice or if they are disposable.



- c. **Mods/RBAs/RDAs?** These are larger open-system devices, usually made of metal, which can be modified (hence the name “mod”) or rebuilt to fit customer preferences for battery size, voltage, temperature control, etc. RBAs (rebuildable atomizers), RDAs (rebuildable dripping atomizers), & RTAs (rebuildable tank atomizers) are included in this category. Examples of this category, along with its various components, are pictured below. Although brands are endless, you may see names like VaporFi, Joyetech, and Sapor.



- d. **Herbal/Dry chamber vaporizers, designed for loose-leaves?** Vaporizers designed to heat loose-leaf plant material without burning it. These are marketed to create a “cleaner” high than traditional forms of smoking, and often used for marijuana. Can be sold as a pen style, portable style, or desktop style. Common brands include Pax, G, CloudV, Da Buddha, Firefly, and Volcano.



13. E-liquids/juices

a. Are e-liquids/juices sold? Liquids used in all electronic smoking devices except for herbal vaporizers. They may or may not contain nicotine added to a base of propylene glycol or vegetable glycerin. They also may or may not contain flavors, menthol, caffeine, THC, or other psychoactive substances. If e-liquids are not sold, you may check N/A for the remaining questions until #15: Cartridges.



b. Candy/Fruit Flavored? Common flavors include fruit flavors (cherry, blueberry, melon) and candy flavors (cotton candy, bubblegum, chocolate, and vanilla). Please check YES to the questions below if any of the e-liquids appear to contain candy/fruit flavors, regardless of what the e-liquid is named. Some e-juices have names that do not reflect the precise flavoring, such as “Lizard Guts” or “Unicorn Puke”. If you cannot tell what flavors are in a generic name, please do not answer questions regarding that particular flavor. If e-liquids are not sold, please select “N/A” for these questions. Many agencies are interested in tracking flavors that have demonstrated carcinogenic effects, such as cinnamaldehyde. If you are interested in looking at the availability of cinnamon or buttery/creamy flavors specifically, please note these at the end of the store assessment in the Field Notes.



c. Flavors of Alcoholic Drinks? Popular flavors of alcoholic drinks include Sex on the Beach, Whiskey Lemonade, Mojito, Margarita, Pina Colada, and Bourbon. None of these e-juices actually contain alcohol but are meant to taste like the flavors of those alcoholic drinks. Vaporizers designed to vaporize ethanol

(e.g., Vaportini, Vapir, Vapshot) are almost never sold in vape shops, and should be recorded in the Field Notes section if noted.



- d. **Menthol/Mint Flavored?** Menthol e-juices are also sometimes labeled as mint, wintergreen, ice, or frost. Others may just say “menthol”.



- e. **Nicotine-free?** Refers to e-juices that do not contain any nicotine. Vape Snack products are examples of 0 nicotine e-liquids. Most e-hookah pens are nicotine-free as well. Please note that new lines of e-liquids are coming out that are labeled as TFN (Tobacco-Free Nicotine). These e-liquids **do** contain nicotine (and would not qualify as nicotine-free under this question), but the nicotine is allegedly not derived from tobacco plants. If you wish to track the prevalence of TFN e-juices, please note this in the Field Notes at the end.



- f. **Contains THC?** Depending on state policies, some stores may sell e-juices or oils containing THC.



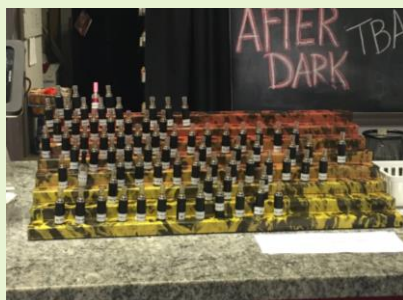
- g. **Contains CBD?** Cannabidiol (CBD) is a major nonpsychoactive component found in marijuana, which does not cross the blood-brain barrier to produce any subjective effects. It is not regulated in most states, and may be available as an e-juice in vape shops - even in states that currently prohibit THC.



- h. **Contains caffeine?** This question refers to e-juices that contain caffeine within the liquid, NOT coffee-flavored e-liquids.



- i. **In a self-service display?** Check that self-service is available if you can access e-liquids yourself through a walk-up display, or if it appears that consumers would get their own e-liquids and bring them to the counter to purchase. Do not include locked cabinets or vending machines that require clerk assistance.



14. If e-liquids/juices and cartridges are sold, does the store have a menu of e-liquids/juices?

A menu may be a printed booklet on the counter, a pamphlet that people can take home with them, or a handwritten menu board posted on the wall. If the menu is not easily visible to customers without asking for assistance from the clerk, answer this question as “no”.



15. Cartridges: Please complete this question in the same manner as #13. Cartridges are pictured below.



16. Price promotions, including clearance, on e-liquids or devices?

A price promotion is a temporary discount that may entice people to buy at a particular, often immediate time, and may use ads with the phrase “buy now.” Popular price promotions include cents/dollar-off promotions, multi-pack discounts and buy-one-get-one (BOGO) deals. Other words to look for include “special offer,” “discount,” “reduced price,” “special promotion,” or “promotional offer.” Items on clearance can also be coded under this question. *Please consider components of vaporizers, such as atomizers or coils, under this question.*



17. Can customers sample e-juices while inside the store/kiosk...

- a. **If they bring their own device?** This question refers only to sampling e-liquids. Some stores allow sampling of flavors only if the customer brings their own vaporizer to use.
- b. **Using a device provided by the store?** Other stores allow sampling of both the vaporizer and the e-juices. Generally, these stores offer disposable plastic mouthpieces (often referred to as “drip tips” or “condom tips”) or metal reusable tips that can be sterilized between users. These tips allow customers to sample various e-juices or devices in the store without cross-contamination. You can note if tips are available in the Field Notes section.

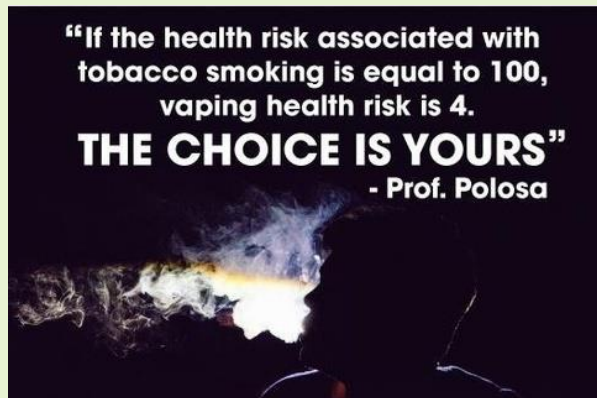
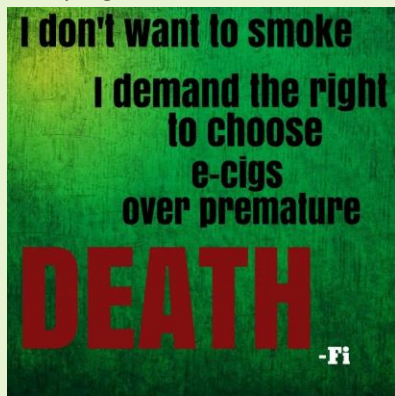


MESSAGING

18. One or more sign(s) posted inside the store/kiosk that...

The questions that follow only apply to signs, posters, or ads placed visibly inside the store, *not* to testimonials/anecdotes verbally told by staff or store owners.

- a. **Suggest vaping is safer than smoking conventional cigarettes (including customer testimonials)?** This refers to any sort of signs, posters, or ads found inside the store that convey harm reduction messages about vaping, such as the below:



- b. **Promote vaping as a way to quit smoking conventional cigarettes (including customer testimonials)?** Many vape store owners or staff members claim that vaping is an effective method of smoking cessation, and they use signs, ads or posters like the ones below to convey this message to customers:





- c. **Promote vaping as a cheaper alternative to conventional cigarettes?** Signs such as those below represent many people’s belief that vaping saves money when compared with smoking conventional cigarettes.

	Normal Cigarette Smoker Per year	E-Cig Smoker Per Year	Savings Per Week	Savings Per Year
10 Per Day	\$1,274	\$187	\$21	\$1,087
20 Per Day	\$2,548	\$374	\$42	\$2,174
30 Per Day	\$3,822	\$561	\$63	\$3,261
40 Per Day	\$5,096	\$748	\$84	\$4,348



- d. **Promote vaping in places where smoking is not allowed?**
Please respond whether there are signs that allow vaping where smoking is prohibited.



- e. **Promote a customer loyalty program?** Customer loyalty programs offer discounts to members of a particular vape shop or a chain of vape stores. FiveStars is one customer loyalty network used by small and mid-size business across the country, including some vape shops.



- f. **Are directed towards veterans or the military population?** Many vape shops offer individual discounts to active duty or former military members and feature patriotic advertising, like the below.



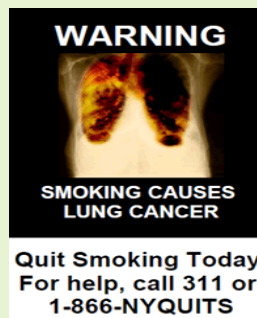
Vape a Vet (VaV) is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit that distributes e-cigarettes to active and former military service members nationwide at no financial cost to them. They are not a tobacco product retailer, but instead share information, equipment and care packages with veterans who want to switch from combustible to electronic smoking products. They showcase testimonials such as the below, which you may find while inside of a vape shop.



- g. **Are directed towards college students?** Vape shops located in college or university towns often offer discounts to students, or use signage that appeals to students.



- h. **Display graphic health warning signs?** Although not usually seen in regards to vaping, please note any pictorial graphic health warnings inside the store. They can pertain to vaping or conventional tobacco products. Examples of graphic warnings for conventional tobacco products include signs like the below:



19. **Signs stating that vaping is allowed in the store/kiosk?**

Please respond whether there are any signs posted that state whether vaping is allowed inside the store.

20. **Anyone vaping inside the store while you completed this audit (including store staff)?**

Now, please record whether anyone in the store was actually vaping while you were inside. This can include store staff or customers. Please answer this question according to what you witnessed while inside the store, regardless of any signs or stated store policies, which were addressed in #19.

21. **Branded marketing materials for vaping products placed in the interior of the store?**

Branded Marketing Materials:

Common **marketing materials** for electronic smoking products include signs, displays, shelving units, or functional items. Marketing materials that are **branded** are those which include the brand insignia, brand imagery, brand font, and/or brand colors. To qualify as branded, materials must be pre-printed, not handmade. Clothing is not included in the scope of this question. However, materials that are

preprinted with the branded product but then have a price added by the store (handwritten or otherwise) still qualify as “branded”.

Please answer “yes” to this question if there are any branded marketing materials placed on the inside of the store. Examples include branded advertisements or signs placed on the interior store walls, branded functional items displayed inside the store (e.g., a trash can displaying an ad for Mark Ten placed by the cash register or a clock displaying the Vuse logo), branded vaping product displays, or branded shelving units.



22. Branded marketing materials for vaping products placed on the exterior of the store?

Exterior marketing materials typically include branded signs and functional items (e.g. branded trash can) placed outside of the store. Include signs that are directly attached to the store exterior (on any side of the building). These may include signs pasted on the outside of a store window or door, as well as signs that are on the interior of windows or doors facing the exterior. Do not count marketing materials that are not branded or hand-made. You can look for these marketing materials in the following places: windows/doors, building exterior, sidewalk, parking lot area, street lights, fences, sidewalks, hanging flags.



23. Ask the clerk at the end of the survey:

As these questions may not be well-received, depending on the store and its staff, we recommend that you save both of these items for last.

a. **“Can store staff make e-liquids (mix propylene glycol and/or vegetable glycerin, flavors, and/or nicotine) on-site?”**

Please ask this question to determine whether e-juices are mixed in the store by staff rather than at a manufacturing company. Propylene glycol and vegetable glycerin are the two liquids that can be used as the base in e-liquids, to which nicotine, flavors, or colors may be added. Answer this question according to what the clerk says, rather than trying to make assumptions based on observation.

b. **“Does the store allow customers/staff to mix e-liquids on-site?”**

Please ask the clerk whether the customers or store staff are allowed to mix existing e-liquids to create new flavors on site. An example of this would be mixing a chocolate flavored e-liquid with a strawberry e-liquid to create a new chocolate strawberry flavor. In this scenario, the nicotine, flavors, and e-liquid bases have already been created, and the staff/customers are just combining the flavors. You may want to also make a note of whether gloves are used for the mixing process in the Field Notes.