

# RECREATIONAL NITROUS OXIDE

## NITROUS OXIDE (NO) RETAIL LANDSCAPE ANALYSIS: HUMBOLDT COUNTY EEL RIVER VALLEY

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.



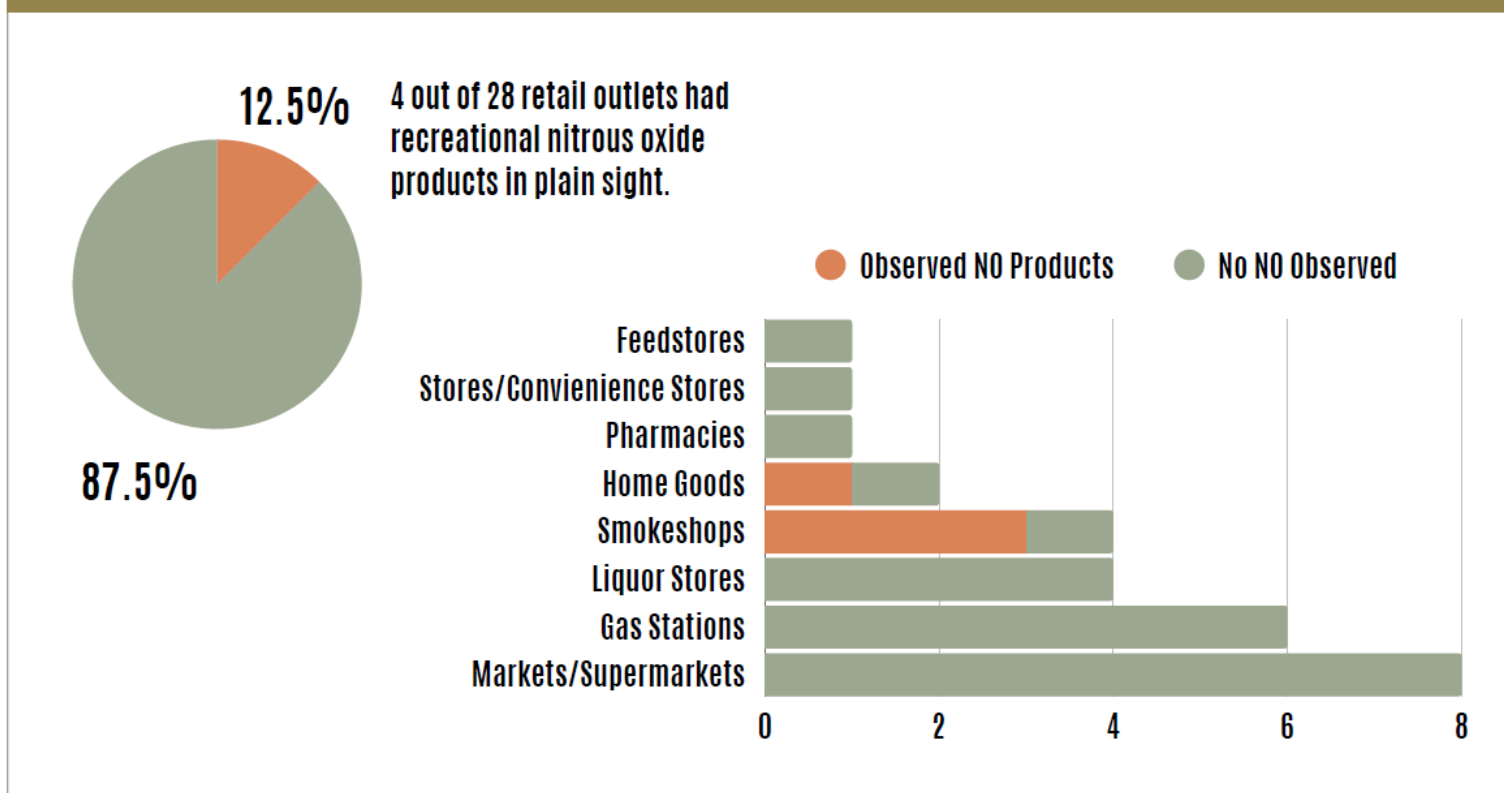
Nitrous oxide “whippet” canister litter found at the mouth of the Van Duzen River near Alton.

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 Humboldt. Public Health and key partners from the Health & Social Policy Institute-Communities Addressing Nicotine (HASPI-CAN) completed the Eel River Valley (ERV) observations. 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 and HAPSI-CAN completed 28 visits to retail outlets throughout the ERV, including Ferndale, Fortuna, Rio Dell and Scotia.

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 “Unincorporated Humboldt County and City of Trinidad” Nitrous Oxide (NO) Retail Landscape Analysis reports.

A wide variety of NO products and paraphernalia located in plain sight were found at three smoke shops in Fortuna and one home goods store in Ferndale. 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,” “Galaxy Gas,” “Baking Bad,” “Creative Whip” and “Breaking Bad” were found. There is an additional retail outlet in Rio Dell which community members and other retailers have disclosed may be selling nitrous products out of plain sight.

### LOCATED IN PLAIN SIGHT NITROUS OXIDE OBSERVATIONS



Nitrous oxide was observed at smoke shops and was not available in plain sight at other retail establishments, with the exception of the store in Ferndale. The Ferndale store had a “Creative Whip” cracker and canister set, as well as replacement canisters on display behind the counter, presumably intended for home-based culinary use. A notable finding from these observations was recreational nitrous oxide products were only observed in plain sight within the City of Fortuna (with the exception of Ferndale’s home store) in the ERV. Anecdotally, community members have shared that residents from other jurisdictions in the ERV travel to the outlets in Fortuna to purchase nitrous oxide products. The majority of the observations were undisclosed. The “located in plain sight” NO observations were only disclosed to a small handful of retailers (roughly 8%) where partners from HASPI-CAN or Public Health staff have established relationships and/or felt safe to have these conversations.