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Whiteclay  
beer sales drop

Alcohol is not allowed on the Pine Ridge Reservation. Yet, only a few miles away from Pine Ridge, millions of cans of beer are sold each year in Whiteclay, NE – most of which are illegally smuggled into the reservation.

Regular protests have been held in Whiteclay because of the amount of beer sold in its liquor stores and the unsolved deaths of two Native Americans in Whiteclay in 1999. Whiteclay has a population of 14 people and sold about 4.9 million cans of beer in 2010.

Activists say that the beer sales in Whiteclay are contributing to the high rate of alcoholism on the poverty-stricken reservation and have called for closing the liquor stores in the tiny Nebraska town that lies just outside the reservation boundaries.

The Oglala Sioux Tribe last year filed a federal lawsuit that sought \$500 million in damages from the Whiteclay stores, their distributors and big-name beer manufacturers. A judge dismissed the lawsuit, saying the tribe didn't have a legal case.

Efforts to curtail beer sales through the Nebraska legislature likewise have gone nowhere. A bill introduced this year that would have increased the state's beer excise tax by 5 cents a gallon to help law

enforcement, including better policing in Whiteclay, was killed in committee earlier this month.


Despite these defeats, there is some signs of progress. A report by the Nebraska liquor control commission showed that Whiteclay beer sales continued to fall last year, with 3.9 million cans of beer sold. That's a drop of about 1 million cans of beer since 2010.

Activists have attributed the decline in beer sales to increased awareness of Whiteclay and the efforts of Pine Ridge residents to discourage drinking.


It isn't enough to make alcohol illegal on the reservation, attitudes toward drinking have to change if progress is to be made to reduce or eliminate the damaging effects of excessive alcohol consumption on the reservation, where one in four children are born with fetal alcohol syndrome or fetal alcohol spectrum disorder.

Nearly 4 million cans of beer sold in one year in one tiny Nebraska town is still a lot of beer. But the trend toward less beer smuggled into the Pine Ridge Reservation from Whiteclay is heading in the right direction.

– Rapid City Journal,  
March 26, 2013



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