



# COUNTY OF SANTA CRUZ

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CARLOS J. PALACIOS, COUNTY EXECUTIVE OFFICER

## NEWS RELEASE



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### BOARD TAKES STEPS TO BAN RECREATIONAL NITROUS SALES

The Santa Cruz County Board of Supervisors on Tuesday approved the first reading of an ordinance prohibiting the sale and distribution of nitrous oxide for recreational use in unincorporated areas of the county.

Nitrous oxide, commonly known as “laughing gas” or “whippets,” has legitimate medical and industrial uses but is increasingly misused recreationally, particularly by youth. Local law enforcement has reported seizures of nitrous oxide containers in recent months, and community concerns have grown over its accessibility and associated health and safety risks.

“This ordinance is about protecting our community — especially our young people — from the very real dangers associated with nitrous oxide misuse,” said Supervisor Kimberly De Serpa, who sponsored the measure. “As a former school district trustee and current medical professional, I know how recreational abuse of nitrous oxide is harming youth and families. The misuse of nitrous leads to long-term health effects and creates risks in our community. We have a responsibility to act.”

Under the proposed ordinance, sales of nitrous oxide for legitimate medical, industrial, culinary, or automotive purposes would remain legal, but over-the-counter sales for recreational use would be prohibited. Violations could result in misdemeanor penalties, including fines and jail time.

The Board’s action aligns Santa Cruz County with other California jurisdictions, including Orange, Humboldt, and San Mateo counties, that have either already enacted restrictions or are taking steps to do so. A second reading and final adoption is scheduled for September 30, 2025. If adopted at that time, the ordinance will take effect 31 days later.