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Santa Fe makes a bold move on e-cigarettes

By Karen Blumenfeld

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The use of electronic smoking devices is a serious health hazard and concern not only for those using the products, but also to innocent bystanders exposed to the vapor smoke. The U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reports a doubling of the use of e-cigarettes by youth from 2011-12.

Santa Fe's City Council took a bold and much-needed step to protect its citizens and visitors by adopting a ban on the sale of electronic cigarettes to minors, and prohibiting the use of these devices in bars, restaurants and other public spaces covered under the city's existing smoke-free ordinance.

The trend in public health is to ban the use of electronic smoking devices inside public places and workplaces: New York City, Chicago, Boston, New Jersey, North Dakota, Utah, Savannah, Indianapolis and other jurisdictions have recently done that and many more are in process.

Back in 2009, the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) tested some of these products, finding toxins and carcinogens, and expressed safety concerns. Recent Roswell Park Cancer Institute studies found "significant amounts of nicotine" emitted in secondhand e-cigarette vapor smoke and in the air, raising concerns about exposure, especially to vulnerable populations, including children, pregnant women and people with cardiovascular conditions.

German Cancer Research Center researchers concluded that e-cigarettes emit fine and ultrafine inhalable liquid particles, nicotine and cancer-causing substances into the air, which can have an adverse health effect on third parties exposed to the vapor. These researchers suggest that electronic smoking devices be restricted for usage under nonsmoker protection legislation.

Nicotine exposure in the vapor smoke poses serious health concerns to innocent bystanders and to users. Nicotine causes headaches in persons exposed to secondhand smoke; releases epinephrine (adrenaline), which raises blood pressure, heart rate and respiration, and glucose levels; and affects oxidative stress, which adversely affects brain and lung development in children.

Santa Fe closed a loophole on a relatively new product and the city's foresight will protect its youth, and all residents and visitors from these unregulated products.

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