



COMMISSIONER'S COMMENTS



E-Cigarettes & Youth, Marriage Headed for Disaster

Alarm bells have been going off with the recent report from Centers for Disease Control (CDC) about youth tobacco use. While traditional cigarette usage is down almost 42 percent among high school students from 2011 to 2014, electronic cigarette use dramatically increased from 1.5 percent to 13.4 percent. Hookah use also rose significantly—more than doubling from 4.1 percent to 9.4 percent.

E-cigs and hookah are now the top two tobacco products used by high school students today and these increases more than cancel out the drop in cigarette smoking. The result is that overall tobacco use has inched slightly up to 24.6 percent. The increase in hookah smoking is particularly disturbing because it involves inhaling burned tobacco via a water pipe and carries many of the identical health risks of cigarette smoking. An hour-long hookah session includes 200 puffs compared to a 20-puff cigarette and the amount of smoke inhaled is more than 100 fold. This is definitely not a safe substitute for cigarette smoking.

E-cigarettes have been considered a “healthier” option because there is no smoke. The attractive flavors are directly appealing to the young and e-cig initiation very often leads to smoking eventually. Brain chemistry changes make nicotine addiction particularly hard to beat and those who are currently struggling with this have my total sympathy. That’s why prevention in the first place is the best approach. Ask adult smokers and you find the vast majority started as teenagers.

E-cigarettes are now big business. Sales are expected to top \$10 billion by 2017. With flavors such as Cherry Crush, Sweet Tarts and Watermelon Splash it is no secret who these companies are targeting. Tobacco companies are not allowed to use these flavor temptations to market tobacco cigarettes anymore, but it seems they have found a sinister approach to thwart the law and trap young people into a life of addiction.

That is why I am happy to report that on May 5 the Putnam County Legislature unanimously passed a code revision to include electronic cigarettes in our Clean Indoor Air act, making it illegal to use e-cigs anywhere smoking is prohibited. Raising the minimum age to purchase cigarettes to 21 years continues to be discussed.

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