

W I S C O N S I N FIRE CHIEF



A PUBLICATION OF THE WISCONSIN STATE FIRE CHIEFS' ASSOCIATION
6737 W. WASHINGTON ST. • SUITE 4210 • WEST ALLIS, WI 53214

WINTER 2016 • VOL. 10, NO. 4



NFA Weekend
A Success!

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COVER PHOTO
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E-Cigarettes: Evidence-Based Review Reveals Potent Threats to Life and Property

by Deborah Grayson, Smoke-Free Housing Program Manager, American Lung Association;
Dona Wininsky, Director of Public Policy and Communications, American Lung Association;
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Electronic cigarettes are marketed as a sexy AND safe alternative to traditional cigarettes; unfortunately, neither claim is true. E-cigarettes, many of which look like conventional cigarettes, have the same potential negative health effects as regular cigarettes. In addition, there are increasing reports of explosions, fires, poisonings and even illegal drug use with these devices.

Electronic cigarettes, electronic nicotine delivery systems, hookah pens and vape pens, commonly referred to as e-cigs, hit the U.S. market in 2007 and have grown in popularity ever since. It is now estimated that more than 2.5 million Americans use e-cigs (USFA).

Rather than burning tobacco as with traditional cigarettes, e-cigarettes use a lithium battery to heat a cartridge containing e-juice or e-liquid. Once heated, the liquid becomes aerosolized. Among users, this is known as “vaping”. This aerosol or vapor is inhaled into the lungs. In addition to nicotine, the addictive element of the product, the aerosolized liquid also can often contain heavy metals, ultrafine particulates and cancer-causing agents (CDC). Common flavorings have been found to contain chemicals like diacetyl that have been linked directly to irreparable lung damage. These noxious substances are also present in secondhand emissions, thereby potentially impacting the health of innocent bystanders beyond just the user.

The e-juice or e-liquid is available in traditional tobacco flavors as well as bubble gum, cotton candy and chocolate. Unfortunately, the novelty of this high-tech electronic device combined with candy flavors make e-cigs very appealing to young people. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the number of youth who have tried e-cigarettes more than tripled



between 2011 and 2013. It is now estimated that more than 263,000 young people have tried these products.

Until recently, these products were virtually unregulated by the federal government. However, as of May 2016, that has begun to change. The federal Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has issued rules, which are a first step toward regulating e-cigarettes and other previously unregulated tobacco products including cigars and hookah. These rules will:

- Prohibit sales to children under 18, require retailers to verify age for over-the-counter sales and provide for federal enforcement and penalties against retailers who sell to minors.
- Prohibit free samples.
- Restrict vending machine sales to adult-only facilities.

E-Cigarettes continues on next page

WHAT ARE E-CIGARETTES?

An electronic cigarette is an oral device that can be used to simulate smoking and that produces an aerosol of nicotine and/or other substances.

THEY TAKE MANY FORMS

E-cigarettes are also known as e-hookahs, hookah pens, vape pens, vaporizers, e-cigars, and e-pipes.



- Require all tobacco products containing nicotine to carry an addiction warning label and cigars to carry one of four other warnings as well.
- Require disclosure of ingredients and documents related to health and authorize FDA to request additional documents related to research and marketing.
- Prohibit the introduction of new or changed products without prior FDA review and scientific evidence demonstrating that allowing a product is “appropriate for the protection of public health.”
- Prohibit manufacturers from claiming a tobacco product is less harmful without first providing the FDA with scientific evidence supporting the claim and demonstrating that it will benefit public health as a whole, and not just individual tobacco users.
- Authorize the FDA to set standards governing the content of tobacco products.

The new rules, however, do not address concerns such as flavorings, marketing or restricting where e-cigs may be used, leaving these issues up to state and local governments.

As documented by the National Fire Protection Agency (NFPA) and the U.S. Fire Administration (USFA), e-cigs are hazardous because they can cause explosions and fires. Between 2009 and 2014, the USFA states that 25 explosions and fires occurred due to e-cigarettes. In 2015, at least an additional 15 e-cigarette related fires and explosions were reported (NFPA). The explosions have been attributed to inappropriate charging of the lithium batteries, the shape and construction of the device (USFA), and a current lack of federal regulation for these devices. Additionally, the seeming interchangeability of the charging plugs coupled with the wildly different internal resistors and charging systems presents a very real overheating potential, which has been cited in fires across the nation.

It might seem that the risk of fire is remote, however, at least two home fires in Wisconsin were attributed to e-cigarette explosions. As reported by WXOW.com and the dailymail.com the La Crosse fire department stated that these two fires happened due to overcharging the device and a charger malfunction. No human lives were lost, but two dogs did die in the fires.

E-cigarettes have caused at least three fires in the cargo area of passenger airlines. Each of these fires was due to the devices overheating. As a consequence, on April 4th, 2016, the Department of Transportation implemented a new federal rule, which bans e-cigarettes in all checked luggage. In addition, both passengers and flight crew are not allowed to use or charge e-cigarettes in the cabin.

Beyond just causing damage to property, e-cigarettes have been implicated in personal injury and poisonings in people. There are numerous media accounts of people suffering severe bodily damage from exploding e-cigarettes. Not only have e-cigarettes exploded while charging but also they have occurred when people were inhaling on the device -- resulting in burns to the face and loss of eyes and teeth. Explosions have also occurred in peoples' hands causing terrible burns. A dramatic video that went viral last February shows a device exploding in the man's pant pocket, causing second-degree burns (NBC News).

Poisonings in young children also have skyrocketed as e-cigs become more popular. The CDC reported that the number of calls to poison centers involving e-juice rose from one per month in September 2010 to 215 per month by February 2014. More than half of these calls related to children five and under. The reason for these poisonings is two-fold: the containers are not childproof, and kids are drawn to the candy flavored liquid.

Another dangerous trend that is emerging is to replace e-juice with illegal drugs, such as marijuana and flakka. As reported on CCN, youth are doing this in public places and not being caught because there is no smell associated with e-cigs. Because this activity can be so discreet, it has made drug enforcement more difficult.

The scope of damage that e-cigarettes can inflict on people is well documented in a 15 page article put out by the American Nonsmokers' Rights Foundation. This document provides a myriad of additional examples of the hazards (fires, burns, poisonings, illegal drug use) that these devices have caused.

E-Cigarettes continues on next page



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As prevention regains its necessary stature in the fire service, active involvement by Fire Chiefs at the local, state and national level on the issue of e-cigarettes is imperative. Some suggestions are:

- Document e-cigs as the cause of explosions/fires. To date, the majority of these incidences have been reported in the media rather than in a comprehensive database. It is likely that e-cig related fires are under-reported as a result.
- Document e-liquid poisonings, as these cases are also not systematically collected.
- Educate students about the hazards associated with the use of e-cigarettes.
- Promote banning the use of e-cigarettes in public places. The Clear Air Law does not cover the use of e-cigarettes in public places. However, in Wisconsin, at least 14 cities and 22 counties have voluntarily included them in their smoke-free policy.
- Educate owners/managers of multi-unit buildings about the hazards of these products. Clear Gains: Wisconsin's Smoke-Free Multi-Unit Housing Initiative recommends that e-cigarettes be included in all smoke-free policies. Since these devices look like cigarettes it can make enforcement difficult if they are not included in the policy. Including them in a smoke-free policy will also reduce or eliminate the fire hazards and potential health effects associated with these devices.

Clearly as more and more scientific evidence emerges, we are learning that e-cigarettes are NOT the harmless alternative to traditional cigarettes that the industry would have consumers believe. And, with the dramatic increase in dual use, as well as previously nonsmoking youth experimenting with them, e-cigarettes may well be the path to future tobacco addiction – not a healthy scenario under any circumstances. These concerns, plus the rise in fires and poisonings, indicates a strong need for increased vigilance and policies that go beyond what have been offered to date. There is much to be done to put common sense restrictions in place before e-cigarettes become the overwhelming public health issue that smoking has been for the last half-century or more. 🔥

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