

Haverford and other municipalities right to limit vape and smoke shops

Guest column by Stephen F. Gambescia



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Concerned residents, especially parents of teens, teachers, and youth activity leaders have noticed the not-so-subtle facades ostensibly posing as “convenience stores.” It is not hyperbolic to claim that these newfangled vape and smoke shops look like youth hangouts, replete with neon lights, colorful banners and flags, sandwich signs, arcade-looking games of skill, and youth-oriented snacks. This is not what one expects of an “adult only” atmosphere.

For owners to claim they do not want to attract youth to these shops and their wares is disingenuous.

The electronic nicotine delivery system (ENDS) is a viable and useful “harm reduction” device, when used as intended can help with quitting smoking. Vaping should be done temporally, not used to create a long-term crutch, and certainly not used as a youth onset activity.

Unfortunately, as it has been discovered and reported, what began as a genuine quit smoking aid, like nicotine gum and “the patch,” vaping morphed into a cottage industry to get our youth to use the product. The campaigns for the leading brands, such as Juul, were like those of the tobacco companies, who pedaled cigarettes to our youth for decades.

Lobbyists and apologist for the vaping enterprise may quibble with the nature and extent of the health risks to these substances, but the health risk debate can be simplified this way: Breathing anything into one's lungs outside of pure unadulterated air is a bad idea. Suffice it to say that extant studies find “normalizing” vaping, especially to teens, problematic.

Regarding the device, they are sometimes used to vape substances that are far more dangerous than nicotine-enhanced liquids, such as THC. Furthermore, imports of the liquids used in vaping are questionable, and with little safeguards of government oversight.

Public officials at all levels of health care and public health, having learned more about the dangers of vaping and the increase in youth onset, find themselves in a “here we go again” fight. Much progress has been made to drive down smoking in the U.S. after decades of deceit and deception by the tobacco oligopoly. Knowing that many adults were coming around to quitting, the tobacco industry with their promoters, targeted youth.

Following the Four Ps of marketing — product, promotion, price, and place — the industry began selling vaping products in colorful packages and a range of flavors that mimic what one would expect in the chewing gum racks. Where these products are sold is the salient concern of many residents of Haverford Township. An evidenced-based guide for any controlled sale of a potentially harmful substance to youth shows that they should not be in establishments or around places frequented by youth.

If established, they should be in areas heavily monitored by owners, police and especially a watchful public.

Expecting this nascent industry to act responsibly to “control” minors’ use of these products is naïve. We have had decades of experience with youth onset to forbidden fruits — tobacco, alcohol, now vaping — and we know that the public health and school systems are no match for these enterprises’ marketing tactics.

Our neighborhoods will be no worse off without vaping, smoke, and tobacco shops.

Given these establishments are here for now, Haverford Township’s proposed ordinance to restrict where vaping, smoke, and tobacco shops are set up for sales, and at some level restrict their promotion, is a reasonable and responsible response

of good government to adhere to their duty to “promote, protect, and facilitate public health, safety, morals, and general welfare” of residents and visitors.”

Let’s hope other townships follow suit by controlling the vape and smoke shops, if not county and state officials taking a strong protective stance.

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