

## **LOCAL VAPE SHOPS SPEAK OUT AGAINST HEALTH ALLEGATIONS**

By Sid Elford

Winona Lake, Ind. – Vaping has been a hot topic issue since its creation, but has grown into a largely popular alternative to other smoking options. However, the vaping industry is experiencing some public backlash following the recent deaths of seven people from apparent vape-related health complications.

Mitch Zeller, Director of the Food and Drug Administration's Centre for Tobacco Products, announced on Thursday the agency's Office of Criminal Investigations opened a criminal probe into the cause of the unprecedented vaping-related lung diseases that has affected approximately 530 people. Patients first began showing symptoms of lung disease nationwide in July.

Health officials have said no consistent vaping products, substances, additives, or brands have been identified in all cases, nor has any one product or substance been conclusively linked to lung disease in patients.

Local Vapers in the Winona Lake area have their own opinions about the allegations, which they claim is supported by scientific evidence. The lack of overall information is hurting the vaper's crusade to help cigarette smokers kick their habit, they say:

"People are dying from street drugs," said Jake England, who's owned Village Vapors in Winona Lake since 2013. The 15-year pack-a-day smoker said that he was able to quit his cigarette addiction in just a week after his friend suggested that he try a vape instead.

Bernice Phifer, general manager of Vape St. on Winona Avenue, said there are only four ingredients that make up vape products: “You got your pg, your vg, your nicotine, and you flavouring.”

PG is the propylene glycol, a synthetic food additive that belongs to the same group as alcohol. It is a colorless, odourless, slightly syrupy liquid that is slightly thicker than water. The PG in a vape “carries the flavour, Phifer explained. The VG stands for vegetable glycerine, a sugar alcohol derived from animal products, plants or petroleum. The Vg in a vape is what makes the fog when vapers exhale.” The third and fourth ingredients in a vape are nicotine, and then the flavouring, both of which are optional.

To fully understand the difference between cigarettes and vapes requires that we define smoke and vapour. Smoke is the result of combustion. New chemicals form through the process of combustion called oxidation. Essentially, fire is what makes smoke.

“It’s not on fire,” Phifer said of a vape. “When you smoke a cigarette, a fire has to be involved to create the smoke. You’re inhaling the same thing a car exhaust puts out. It’s 95 percent safer than cigarettes.”

“Nicotine is not what causes illness,” England said. “Nicotine can be found in eggplant, tomatoes, nicotine is found in all sorts of stuff. It’s the tar and the combustion that causes illness and lung cancer.”

Teresa Reed, a communicable disease registered nurse with the Kosciusko County Health Department, said while she can only recommend people don’t engage in picking up an addictive habit to nicotine, she can also only say that she’s really not sure yet about the harms or benefits of vaping.

England said his goal is harm reduction. “Cigarettes kill 480,000 Americans every year,” he said. “States are addicted to the revenue they get from big tobacco and big pharma.” He says it’s a money game that’s trickle-down effect will be catastrophic to the health of the population. “There are over 13 million vapers in this country, 95% of which are former smokers,” he said. “To turn them back to smoking is irresponsible. Until you’ve shown an outright harm from vaping, banning it is excessive.”

The full-steam federal fight is referring to legislation that is being introduced as recently as Thursday by US Senators Mitt Romney, R-Utah, andf Jeff Merkley, D-Ore., that would ban flavoured e-cigarettes and apply cigarette taxes to the devices, among other measures to curb teen vaping.

“Vaping companies have hooked millions of our children on nicotine using e-cigarette flavours like ‘gummy bear,’ ‘scooby snacks,’ and ‘strawberries and cream.’ This means massive health consequences for the next generation, and we have to end this addiction crisis,” Merkley said in a statement. “We need to get these flavours off the market.”

England disagrees. “If you ban the flavours, it will kill vape shops,” adding it’s the responsibility of the parent and the sellers of nicotine to not sell to underage children.

Every vape shop in Kosciusko County that was interviewed defends their staff, saying that they have strict ID policies in order to discourage the sale to underage kids.

Phifer said the first thing she asks a young looking customer when they walk in is how many cigarettes they smoke. “If they say they don’t, then that’s when I start the lecture: ‘What are you doing here? You think this is cool?’” she said. “Vape shop owners

warn that banning flavours will only lead to purchases from the Internet or black market,” claiming that people who want them will find ways of getting them.

Vaping remains a controversial topic with no clear answers as to whether it is healthier than smoking cigarettes or not. Further research will be required to determine whether the seven deaths were in fact vaping related, and whether vaping is safer than cigarettes as many claim that it is.

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