

Dialogue with Vaping Device Retail Store Owners: Summary and Themes



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On November 3, 2015 the Spokane Regional Health District (SRHD) Healthy Communities Program welcomed 11 owners/ operators of 6 local vapor device retail stores to discuss the potential enforcement of vaping devices under the Smoking in Public Places (SIPP) law. Program staff separated participants into 3 groups and asked the following questions:

1. Do you have any question about what this resolution means?
2. Do you have any questions about the process that SRHD is following?
3. How would prohibiting vaping in public places impact you?
4. What do you think should be included in the resolution to be most effective in preventing youth from smoking and vaping?
5. Are there any specific issues that you would like the Board of Health to evaluate while considering this resolution?

Program staff also asked follow-up questions as necessary, answered clarifying questions, and allowed time for additional comments and concerns. Additional staff transcribed the conversations.

Generation of Themes

Steven Smith, a program evaluator from the SRHD Data Center attended the meeting and, following the transcription of notes, analyzed responses and notes from program staff. In order to generate appropriate themes, Steven employed an “open coding” strategy to pull consistent and pressing themes from the qualitative data. The following is the results from that process.

Theme #1: Conflicting Data/Information

The largest and most consistent issue expressed by vapor store owners/operators involved concern or disagreement about the facts and studies used by SRHD. Many brought contradictory studies. While some claimed that the sources used by SRHD were wrong, most mentioned that the information was inconsistent and still developing. Example comments include:

- *Studies don't make sense or represent facts*
- *Equal amount of studies saying that vapor is not dangerous. Easy to find support for what you want to prove. How do you define harm?*
- *No data to support nicotine levels being harmful to children... Engage in fact not fear.*

Studies continue to emerge about the effects of vaping and will likely not reach consensus levels for some time. It should be noted that all facts and figures used in SRHD materials come from reputable and (as available) peer-reviewed sources.

Theme #2: Stores Rely on Sampling and In-Store Use

Vapor store owners/operators expressed a high concern for the impact of including vapor devices in SIPP on in-store sampling and usage. Almost all participants in the meeting claimed that the ability of customers to sample flavors, test products, and learn about the vaping experience was integral to the success of their business and satisfaction of customers. Vapor stores sell a wide variety of “e-juices” with different flavors and nicotine contents. Participants mentioned that sampling was effective in marketing the product and convincing those doubtful of the claimed benefits to use the product. Owners and operators of vapor stores mentioned that including vapor devices in SIPP would eliminate an industry-wide and crucial practice of vapor stores and hurt sales. Participants regularly mentioned the desire to create an exception for vapor stores in the law. Example comments include:

- *Ability to sample in store is a pivotal part of the business. This way people get what they want. Can't refund juice.*
- *Concern about vaping in the store. It is a huge part of the business. Sampling flavors and nicotine strength are both important.*
- *Demo is not a compromise – would create confusion.*

Theme #3: Openness to Regulation/ Inevitability of Regulation

Many participants expressed some willingness or desire to include or increase regulations on vapor stores, particularly regulations related to limiting sales to minors and preventing youth from exposure. Many owners/operators claimed to currently restrict minors from entering their businesses and/or sample the product. Many also supported allowing businesses to voluntarily restrict vaping inside if they desired and acknowledged that some regulation was inevitable. Participants uniformly disagreed with regulating sampling in the stores.

Theme #4: Ineffectiveness of SIPP on Preventing Youth Smoking/Use

Vapor store owners/operators acknowledged that preventing youth smoking and consumption of nicotine is important, but believed that including vapor devices in SIPP did not properly address this issue. Many questioned whether including vaping in public addressed youth smoking or was really an attack on vaping in general. Participants also expressed concerns that including vaping in SIPP would stigmatize vaping and act as a message from SRHD that vaping is harmful which they believe is still undetermined.

Other Themes/Observations

The following is a list of other identified themes from the meeting:

- Vaping has Health Benefits/Healthy Alternative
- Vaping is Not Smoking/Should Not be Treated as Smoking
- Including Vaping in SIPP restricts personal freedom/choice as well infringes on business autonomy