

E-cigarettes

By Andrew Adams
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SALT LAKE CITY — Lawmakers, school districts and parents have all raised concerns about e-cigarettes falling into the hands of young people, but former lifetime smokers say the devices have saved their lives.

"Vapers" are standing by the products as Utah legislators look to potentially add new regulations in the 2014 session, while saying they agree with some of the prospective reforms.

"This is going to save my family's lives and mine," said Candy Kerr. "That's how strongly I feel about it."

Kerr said she was a lifetime smoker until her brother-in-law gave her an electronic cigarette starter kit in March of last year.

"That was the last cigarette I had," she said.

Since that time, Kerr said she had given e-cigarette devices to her mother, father and two sisters — all life-long smokers — and all have now quit cigarettes in favor of vaping.

"I'm still addicted to nicotine and probably will be my whole life, but I love vaping and it's not hurting me," Kerr said.

At Vapor Craziess in Riverton, that kind of story seems to repeat itself over and over as customers shop the store.

"Just over a month later, I'm smoke free," said Rick Donoho, who started smoking when he was 13-years-old.

Tyler Hiatt said electronic cigarettes and vaping got him away from hookah.

"I don't know where I'd be," he chuckled.

Related:

Growing popularity of e-cigarettes concerns educators, lawmakers

Cool, or corrupting? The popularity of e- cigarettes is rapidly expanding, especially with teens, and marketing efforts appear to only be ramping up. It's raising concerns from lawmakers, school districts, public health officials and parents.

Worker Travis Worthen started smoking when he was 15. Twenty-seven years later and having tried several other means to stop smoking cigarettes, he finally switched to e-cigarettes.

"I'd given up, thought nothing's going to help. I'll just be a smoker the rest of my life. I can't quit," he explained. "Tried vaping, took me one week and no cigarettes. No desire to go back."

Store owner Paul Evans, who smoked 12 years before switching to vaping, said the success stories are the reasons he owns a shop.

"In no means, ways, shapes or forms do I sell this as a cessation device. I sell this as an alternative," he said. The alternative, the pro-vaping crowd contends, is safer than carcinogen-filled cigarettes and are much less pricey.

Utah Vapers director Aaron Frazier said a habitual smoker might spend between \$300 and \$500 a month on cigarettes. Vaping, he said, generally costs less than \$50 a month after the initial investment in an e-cigarette.

A reliable, long-lasting device can be had complete for \$35 to \$40, Evans said. Higher-end models can reach into the hundreds of dollars.

When asked if e-cigarettes were addicting, Frazier hedged.

"That's up for debate," he said, pointing out several studies were currently pending. Frazier said he personally believed e-cigarettes were no more addicting than caffeine.

At the Odyssey House in Salt Lake City, adolescent substance abuse treatment program director Mike Dulle said e-cigarettes were "clearly addicting" because they contain nicotine.

He raised the prospect that e-cigs in teens' hands could have the reverse effect some long-time smokers have seen, and could become a gateway to cigarettes for younger people.

"Like any other drug out there that you can become dependent on, you're going to build a tolerance," Dulle said. "You're going to want more and more and more."

Policy status

The policy is currently in the public comment phase. A hearing is scheduled:

Dec. 12

5:30 p.m.

Davis County Health Department in Clearfield

The state legislature takes up the issue in January.

Frazier admitted e-cigarettes aren't "healthy," but he instead called them "harm-reduction products" and equated them to seat belts in cars, which he said can also be dangerous driving down the road.

While different police officials and lawmakers are hearing the devices can be modified to vape THC oils — essentially liquid marijuana — Frazier said he believes that is happening rarely

because it's complicated.

"The atomizers that are designed for this do not get hot enough to vaporize that type of material," Frazier said.

Frazier said vapers don't want to live in a world void of regulation, and he said he supported some legislative aims of Rep. Paul Ray, R-Clinton, including making all age requirements equal with tobacco products, and creating a licensing and compliance process.

Frazier said he worked with Davis County officials to formulate a regulation policy.

"Part of the regulations that we've agreed to with them is that there would be a permitting or licensing requirement, which gives them the authority to go into both retail shops and the manufacturing facilities to inspect them, to make sure that the bottles being sold are accurate, to actually take some liquid, send it off for independent testing to make sure the nicotine contents are what are advertised on the label as well as the ingredients are what are advertised on the label," Frazier detailed. "We support it no differently than permitting for a restaurant. It's a consumable product, it should be."