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## Electric Cigarette Explodes in Fla Man's Mouth

By MELISSA NELSON Associated Press  
PENSACOLA, Fla. February 16, 2012 (AP)

A Florida man trying to kick the smoking habit was puffing on an electronic cigarette when a faulty battery caused it to explode in his mouth, taking out some of his front teeth and a chunk of his tongue and severely burning his face, fire officials said Wednesday.

"The best analogy is like it was trying to hold a bottle rocket in your mouth when it went off," said Joseph Parker, division chief for the North Bay Fire Department. "The battery flew out of the tube and set the closet on fire."

Fire Chief Joseph Miller said the victim contacted the department on Wednesday to thank firefighters and told them he was recovering at a hospital in Mobile, Ala., and anticipated being released later in the day. Officials have not publicly identified him, citing department policy. But a Facebook page under the name of 57-year-old Tom Holloway of Niceville was filled with well-wishers commenting on the injury and database searches matched his address on the fire report with his name.

Holloway was in his office at home when the device exploded, leaving behind burned carpet, chair cushions, pictures and office equipment. A scorched battery case found on a piece of melted carpet appears to be one for a cigar-sized device, the report said. Those in the house with him rushed to his aid in the smoke-filled room and tried to put the fire out with salt, the report said.

Holloway and his family members didn't immediately answer The Associated Press' requests for interviews.

Investigators do not know the brand of cigarette, type of battery or age of the device, Parker said. It appears the battery was rechargeable lithium because a recharging station and other batteries were in the room, he said. Parker has forwarded information about the blaze to the fire marshal's office to include in any databases on the devices. But Parker said he has yet to hear of any similar instances.

Holloway agreed to let firefighters take the burned case and other, undamaged ones with them as examples for reporting to a national database, according to the report. But Holloway has asked for the burned case back. Parker said it could be used as evidence in any litigation, although Holloway did not indicate why he wanted it returned, Parker said.

Thomas Kiklas, co-founder of the Tobacco Vapor Electronic Cigarette Association, said the industry knows of no problems with the cigarettes or batteries exploding.

Kicklas said the rigid, plastic cigarettes include a small battery and cartridge. The battery is designed to generate an electric charge when the device is inhaled. The charge sets off vapor in the cigarette tube. The nicotine-filled mist gives the taste and experience of smoking without the smoke.

Kiklas cited a federal report that found 2.5 million Americans used electronic cigarettes last year.

"There have been billions and billions of puffs on the cigarettes and we have not heard of this happening before," he said.

Fire officials said the victim told them that he was trying to stop smoking, which is why he was puffing on the electronic version. However, the industry does not claim electronic cigarettes allow smokers to kick the habit, just that they are a healthier alternative to traditional cigarettes because they have fewer chemicals, Kiklas said.

The Food and Drug Administration posted a warning about the cigarettes on its website in October saying that e-cigarettes were addictive, could contain dangerous chemicals like nicotine and might encourage kids to try other tobacco products.

In 2010, the agency sent letters to some e-cigarette makers for violations of the Federal Food, Drug and Cosmetic Act including "violations of good manufacturing practices, making unsubstantiated drug claims and using the devices as delivery mechanisms for active pharmaceutical ingredients," according to the FDA website.

Holloway is a photographer, motorcycle enthusiast and Vietnam-era veteran, according to his Facebook page.