

News 12 New Jersey

State legislature considers e-cigarette tax; many communities banning public use

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HACKENSACK - E-Cigarettes could soon be taxed and banned from public places, just like regular cigarettes.

Proponents see them as a way to stop smoking, but others see them as another harmful habit.

Tobacco shop owner Robert Reichert says his e-cigarette is helping him kick the habit. He opposed Gov. Chris Christie's suggestion to add a \$2.70 tax to the devices and their refills. "For them to categorize it as cigarette smoking is crazy to me," Reichert says. "This is something that's going to help people stop smoking. And that's what they should want."

But smoke-free proponent Karen Blumenfeld says even the liquid vapors from an e-cigarette can be harmful. "There are numerous studies that have grave concerns about these chemicals that are in the liquid," she says. "That, as well as being exposed to the second-hand vapor smoke."

The city of Hackensack recently banned all tobacco products, including e-cigarettes, from city parks. It's the 24th municipality in Bergen County to do so.

"Communities want to encourage healthful environments where kids hang out," says Blumenfeld. "And it's really to normalize smoke-free environments and to not give kids mixed messages about using tobacco."

Parents at Johnson Park support the comprehensive ban. "I have seen so many people smoking tobacco everywhere, it's not good for kids, the environment as well. Causes so many health diseases, it's a good initiative," says Ahbijeet Phardwa.

The tax regulations were discussed this week at the first legislative committee hearing of the year, but no decision has been made.

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