

# Mullane: Why ban tobacco, but not wacky tobacco, at NJ colleges?

By J.D. Mullane | Posted: Wednesday, June 19, 2013 12:15 pm

A law banning tobacco at New Jersey's colleges is under consideration in Trenton because college students sometimes engage in unhealthy behavior, such as smoking, binge drinking, sleeping around and majoring in sociology.

As everyone knows, cigarette smoking is bad for you. It kills about 400,000 Americans every year. This is because each cigarette unleashes a tar-laden carpet of pathogens into the deepest recesses of the human body. Smoking invites heart disease, lung cancer and emphysema.

Activists say smoking is so deadly that even breathing the smoke of someone standing next to you will kill. The experts say secondhand cigarette smoke kills 50,000 Americans every year, although I believe they are making up this number. I have yet to know anyone who ever died from secondhand cigarette smoke. I have never read an obit or heard a death announced in the news that noted the deceased died from complications attributed to "secondhand smoke."

However, do not try to tell this to anti-smokers. Their logic is impeccable. Example:

"Jerry died of secondhand smoke."

"No, he didn't — he was run over by a bus trying to cross the street."

"Yeah, but the guy next to him was smoking when he got hit."

See? You cannot win the argument.

But I digress.

My guess is the New Jersey bill banning smoking on college campuses will become law. I read the bill Tuesday, and while the legislation bans all manner of tobacco, it says nothing about wacky tobacco, aka marijuana.

Now, I have some trusted sources in low places who inform me that on college campuses, there are some students who smoke weed, and that they do this regularly. This "weed smoking" occurs in dorm rooms and frat houses and, occasionally, faculty lounges. Shocking, I know.

If a filtered cigarette is deadly — even for a guy trying to catch a bus — what health risk is posed by an unfiltered joint? Is it as deadly? More deadly? And what about secondhand pot smoke?

There are many partisan studies. Some state that marijuana is no more dangerous than cotton candy. Others claim marijuana is a weed with its roots in hell. What to believe? Let's apply common sense.

Smoking a joint is probably as unhealthy as smoking a filtered cigarette. But secondhand pot smoke could pose a larger threat to non-pot smokers.

Say you reside at Rutgers University and your roommate, going through his Bob Marley phase, smokes a joint every day. Being cool, you say nothing. But his daily secondhand pot smoke seeps into your lungs and your bloodstream. Then you flunk a drug screening for your dream job. What do you do? Sue Rutgers? Flush your roommate's stash? Give up, go all Bob Marley, and roll a fattie?

State Assemblywoman Celeste Riley, D-3 of Bridgeton, is the college tobacco ban bill's co-sponsor. I asked her why

the law doesn't also ban marijuana from New Jersey's college campuses.

"It doesn't deal with marijuana because marijuana is illegal," Riley said.

As an illegal controlled substance, anyone caught smoking dope on a New Jersey college campus would be a lawbreaker.

"And, as such," she said, "they should be prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law."

When I finished laughing, I recalled my own days living in Johnson Hall at Temple University. At least I tried to recall. I was going through my Bob Marley phase at the time. That was 27 years ago. Maybe students who live in college dorms today no longer smoke pot and chill, but sit around listening to Barack Obama speeches while contemplating their future at Starbucks.

Anyway, Assemblywoman Riley understood my point, and may tighten the law's language.

"I'm open to considering it. Yes, I guess we should discuss it," she said.

Except she may not have to. A call to New Jersey Global Advisors on Smokefree Policy (GASP) of Summit got me the group's spokesman, Alan Kantz. He told me Riley's bill has language that takes care of pot.

To wit: "'Smoking' means the burning of, inhaling from, exhaling the smoke from, or the possession of a lighted cigar, cigarette, pipe or any other matter or substance which contains tobacco or any other matter that can be smoked, or the inhaling or exhaling of smoke or vapor from an electronic smoking device."

Kantz said the "any other matter that can be smoked" line cinches it.

"Our reading of the language is that the bill includes marijuana," he said.

Unless some state judge going through his Bob Marley phase decrees otherwise.