

CBS NEWS

Massachusetts Town Proposes Ban on All Tobacco Sales

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A small town in central Massachusetts is poised to take the next big step in the tobacco wars.

Officials in Westminster, a town with more than 7,000 residents about an hour northwest of Boston, want to make it illegal to sell any tobacco products to anyone, including adults, reports CBS News correspondent Michelle Miller.

Under the proposal as it's currently written, a person's right to buy cigarettes, chewing tobacco, cigars, electronic cigarettes -- basically anything derived from nicotine or tobacco and meant for human consumption -- would go up in smoke.

"We want to save people's lives and protect the health of the community," Westminster Health Agent Wibby Swedberg said.

Town officials said the sweeping measure is needed to stop the steady stream of new products meant to entice the next generation of tobacco users.

"It's the only product that, if you use it as directed, 50 percent of you are going to die," Swedberg said. "I mean, that's outrageous."

Smokers see it as yet another example of the nanny state -- government policing personal habits.

"I think it's just strange," said resident Judith Cariou Page. "It's like Prohibition. It's like, are we going backwards or are we going forwards? I don't know!"

The draft law, which was posted online Monday, would not make it illegal to smoke in Westminster, but residents would have to purchase their tobacco products elsewhere.

Local shop owners like Brian Vincent, who rely on smokers to also

buy things like candy, newspapers and lottery tickets, want the proposal snuffed out.

"If this passes through the Board of Health, what other items could they possibly ban?" Vincent asked. "Such as candy bars, because they can lead to diabetes. Bologna and bacon, which can lead to high cholesterol."

Municipal Association Tobacco Control Director D.J. Wilson, who helped draft the proposal, said tobacco products are different because they can't be used safely even in moderation.

"I think that if we introduce cigarettes to the marketplace today for the very first time, that they would never be allowed to be sold," Wilson said.

If the law is adopted, violators would be issued \$300 fines and could have their permits suspended or revoked.

A public hearing on the draft measure is scheduled for November 12 and residents have until December 1 to comment in writing.

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