

Wildwood vaping expo canceled after threats of air-quality ticket blitz

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WILDWOOD — The promoter behind a vaping expo canceled the Wildwood convention because of threats of a ticket blitz for violations of New Jersey’s Smoke-Free Air Act.

Promoter Ron Rotatori, of Wildwood, owner of Goodfella’s Vaporium on Pacific Avenue, said he expected 240 vendors and thousands of e-cigarette users from across the region to attend the Oct. 24 Vaping at the Shore show at the Wildwoods Convention Center.

He arranged with convention center staff to let vendors offer samples outside on its 660-square-foot oceanfront deck.

But opponents of vaping in New Jersey, led by a state lawmaker, said the deck did not provide enough distance from the convention center’s side doors to guarantee vapor would not waft into the building. This potentially would violate the state’s Smoke-Free Air Act, amended in 2010 to ban indoor vaping in public.

“They were going to put their agents on the doors and standing there watching every time the door opened. The smallest amount of vapor that comes through, they would issue tickets to me and the convention center,” Rotatori said. “I can’t have people getting harassed by some idiot from Trenton.”

So he canceled the show.

Rotatori’s story about a state senator going around New Jersey like Eliot Ness personally closing down vaping conventions sounds unlikely — except it’s true.

State Sen. Joseph Vitale, D-Middlesex, said he was in Edison when police issued \$50,000 in tickets to vendors and organizers of a vaping convention.

Organizers in Edison set up tables for vendors outside the center so customers could try their products just as event organizers in Wildwood planned to do this month. But vaping also occurred inside the convention hall, Vitale said.

“It was like a scene from a movie in the London fog. The vapor was overwhelming,” Vitale said. “By the end of the event, the health department shut it down. They were violating the Clean Indoor Air Act by allowing the public and other vendors to vape.”

E-cigarettes convert flavored liquids into water vapor that consumers inhale. Some contain nicotine, the primary drug smokers crave in cigarettes.

E-cigarettes saw \$2.5 billion in sales last year, according to analyst IbisWorld. While this still doesn't rival tobacco, a \$122 billion industry employing 45,570 people, vaping is growing at an estimated 25 percent per year while tobacco sales are expected to decline as more smokers kick the habit.

Vitale said he was not planning to attend the convention in Wildwood, but he did make inquiries.

“We heard about the Wildwood convention through some of the public-health advocates who brought it to our attention,” he said.

Vitale said he sponsored the state's Smoke-Free Air Act and thinks vaping with its many sweet flavors is being marketed to New Jersey's children. This is the reason the U.S. Food and Drug Administration banned flavored cigarettes in 2009, he said.

Vitale said too little is known about the potential harmful health effects of using vaporizers. He has been working with public-health advocates to make sure the indoor vaping ban is enforced, he said.

The convention center had agreed to the expo's plan to allow vaping on its deck. It seemed like a good place for it, spokesman Ben Rose said.

“Everything was worked out. Everyone knows you can't smoke inside the building. We have the back deck all set up for demonstrations and for people to vape. We were fine with that on our end,” he said.

The state Department of Health reached out to Rotatori to let him know he could display products but not offer samples indoors, he said.

“Even vaping outdoors in close proximity to the entrance was still a violation of the law,” Vitale said.

Rotatori said he was able to cut his lifelong two-pack-per day habit down to just a couple cigarettes per day by vaping.

“I was a smoker for 52 years. I've been through the patch and pills,” he said. “This relieved the anxiety of the nicotine. You still feel like you're smoking. You don't lose that hand-to-mouth thing.”

Rotatori said his industry is seeing more government scrutiny the bigger it gets. He has talked to other vaping stores in New Jersey that have been ticketed for indoor vaping, he said.

But Rotatori said he will not be cowed. He plans to reorganize a new outdoor convention on a vacant lot on Pacific Avenue in Wildwood next Memorial Day weekend, he said.

“I’m far from done,” he said. “This guy has got some kind of vendetta against the vaping industry. But he’s overstepping due process. I don’t know what his problem is.”

http://m.pressofatlanticcity.com/communities/lower_capemay/wildwood-vaping-expo-canceled-after-threats-of-air-quality-ticket/article_8a1bd37e-7416-11e5-9edf-43eb4111cebc.html?mode=jqm