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E-cigarette ads: Someone should be fuming (editorial)

STATEN ISLAND, N.Y. -- It's been a long time since the Marlboro Man road off into the sunset.

Those enticing cigarette ads -- for Virginia Slims and the like -- were banned years ago.

But now we're seeing, and hearing, ads for e-cigarettes.

They are considered by the federal Food and Drug Administration to be a "tobacco product" because they often -- but not always -- contain nicotine. The e-cig industry has maintained that the products are not smoking cessation devices, but are a "healthier alternative" to smoking.

And many smokers have switched from their traditional brands to the electronic version citing that rationale.

But opponents point out that the flavors now being marketed -- everything from cotton candy to cappuccino -- are aimed at hooking a young market.

While the health risks of e-cigarettes are still being studied, the American Cancer Society, the American Lung Association, the American Heart Association and the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids want them prohibited. That will never happen, but this is what should: Place the same advertising restrictions on e-cigarettes that apply to the real thing.

While they carry the same age restrictions as cigarettes, it's clear that the young Staten Islanders are engulfed in the vaping craze.

That's troubling for a number of reasons.

While the latest Health Department studies have reported a decline in the rate of smokers -- even on Staten Island -- we still have the highest rate in the five boroughs.

A recent [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention report](#) says seven in 10 teens are exposed to e-cigarette advertising on TV, in print, online and at retail outlets.

The report doesn't show a direct link between advertising and teen e-cigarette use, but CDC Director Tom Frieden was quoted as saying that the report raises concerns that the e-cigarette industry will hook young people by using the same advertising methods the tobacco industry once used to get kids addicted to smoking.

A study published in November by the [journal Nicotine & Tobacco Research](#) found adults age 18 to 34 who had never smoked or used e-cigarettes but were exposed to e-cig ads were three times more likely to try the devices for the first time than those who were not.

And many argue that using e-cigs can lead to smoking.

So the hopeful signs in the decline of smokers -- even in the city's most nicotine-loving borough -- could vanish in a cloud of bubble gum-flavored vapor.

http://www.silive.com/opinion/index.ssf/2016/03/e-cig_ads_someone_should_be_fu.html