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Students sound off on proposed smoking ban

By Leader-Telegram staff

When it comes to smoking and a ban on the activity, some area teens have something to say.

During a recent training session, Missy Seibel, youth adviser for the Eau Claire City-County Health Department, educated students involved in Fighting Against Corporate Tobacco about secondhand smoke and Gov. Jim Doyle's proposed workplace smoking ban, and encouraged them to express their opinions.

FACT is a Wisconsin-based, youth-led movement for teens ages 13 to 18, which was started in 2001. Involvement in the group is voluntary.

Seibel received about 20 responses from the following middle schools: Altoona, DeLong, Fall Creek and Northstar. Following is a sampling of what some of those students had to say.

"I am writing because I have the right to breathe in clean air. My dad has smoked since he was 14 and has not been able to quit since. Once I was 5, my dad finally realized it was bad for me and started smoking outside. Now our house smells better, and I can breathe instead of holding my breath. I am proud of my dad's decision and hope others can also make a good choice."

- Sara Kirk, eighth grade, Altoona Middle School

"I hate walking into restaurants that smell like smoke. I can't even eat without inhaling 4,000 different chemicals from secondhand smoke. Over half of the U.S. is already 100 percent smoke-free in bars and restaurants - Wisconsin should be too."

- Josh Burns, seventh grade, Fall Creek Middle School

"Fifteen percent of the toxins produced by a cigarette are inhaled by the smoker. The other 85 percent lingers in the air. Just by being around someone who smokes for less than 15 minutes can cause your body harm. There is no risk-free level of secondhand smoke. I want Wisconsin to become smoke-free because your freedom stops where my nose begins."

- Katherine Sorenson, eighth grade, Fall Creek Middle School

"To years ago, I lost my grandpa to smoking. He smoked for about 59 years ... so bad that his lungs were black. They had to remove one half of his lung, and eventually he had to use an oxygen tank just to breathe. I was so sad that he had to die that way all for a stupid cigarette. He wasn't a bad person; he just made a bad choice."

- Kaitlyn Schmidt, seventh grade, Fall Creek Middle School

"I am writing because I want clean air. It is not right for others to be hurting me. Make Wisconsin smoke-free."

- Eric Huse, eighth grade, DeLong Middle School

Dangers of Exposure

Millions of children are at risk of being exposed to the dangers of secondhand and "third-hand" smoke, which can cause a number of health problems such as brain and neck cancer, upper respiratory tract disorders, tooth decay and behavioral issues, according to Marshfield Clinic's Eau Claire Center.

(The relatively new phrase third-hand smoke describes the chemical contaminants from cigarette smoke that remain in the air and on surfaces even after the cigarette is extinguished. These can be reabsorbed into the body if inhaled or ingested.)

"The majority of children referred to my practice with chronic ear infections come from homes where one or both parents smoke cigarettes," said Dr. Thomas R. Lowry, a board-certified otolaryngologist, or ear, nose and throat doctor, at Marshfield Clinic Eau Claire Center.

He recommends the following to help limit a child's exposure to tobacco smoke:

- If you smoke, stop, and if needed consult your physician for help.

- Consider a home and/or car smoking ban.

- If you used to allow regular

smoking in your home, consider replacing low-cost items such as throw pillows, area rugs and curtains. For items such as couches and carpets, consider a thorough steam cleaning to help reduce the amount of particles, pollutants and allergens trapped in their fibers.