


Central Coast landfill managers see single-use e-cigs, batteries as a growing waste problem

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Melissa Newman

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The vapors from an e-cigarette vanish within seconds of taking a puff, but the device itself can last a lifetime.

Within five minutes of walking into Wild Side Smoke Shop in Isla Vista, you can find people coming in to buy packs of pods and juices to fuel their e-cigarettes.

“Say for the packs we sell roughly a thousand a month, but that’s not even including the refillable juice that you fill your pod with that we also sell a ton of,” explained Wild Side Smoke Shop Sales Associate Alec Sarkissian.

These sales are just a small illustration of the large draw toward e-cigarette use in the U.S. and something Santa Barbara County’s Health Department calls an epidemic among teens.

“The use of electronic cigarettes among young adults and youth in our county has doubled since 2016 and that data is coming out of the 2018 California Healthy Kids Survey,” explained Shantal Hover-Jones, Educator for the Santa Barbara County Health Department.

Now with the increase in users, a new problem is arising – how to dispose of single-use e-cigarette devices and the liquid-filled pods that go into them.

Contrary to what their name might make you think, e-cigarettes aren’t actually e-waste.

“E-cigarettes are a new one for us and they are a problematic waste stream because they have an electronic component but they also have residual nicotine which is a classified hazardous waste (so) it’s acutely hazardous,” said Leslie Robinson, Program Specialist for the Santa Barbara County Public Works Department.

If the e-cigarettes and the pods are just thrown away, they could end up in the landfill.

Public Works says the leftover nicotine can get into the wastewater, poison animals, and even impact the skin of the waste management crews that are handling the trash.

Those aren’t the only concerns.

“The primary concern is the lithium battery inside. Lithium batteries are highly reactive and while the e-cigarette batteries are small, they could produce a fire if they were impacted (by a truck in the landfill),” Robinson explained.

There's now momentum growing in the form of a bill from California State Senator Hannah-Beth Jackson to not only ban single-use e-cigarette pods but also make the producers of these devices accountable for how their products get thrown away.

"If this bill passed, this type of single-use product would no longer be allowed, so we don't really know what the market would look after that but then for the batteries, there would be a program to take these (single-use) batteries back in a responsible way so the lithium ion isn't leached into our environment," Hover-Jones said.

Some consumers and retailers argue adding more laws and restrictions to e-cigarettes isn't going to change habits.

"Everything now comes with the label that says this product contains nicotine. No one regards it. No one cares that it says it's warning this product contains nicotine or whatever," Sarkissian said.

But the health department hopes that will change.

"California is a leader. Santa Barbara County is a leader and I think this is something that we also really need to lead in," Hover-Jones said.

Until a new plan is put into place, Santa Barbara County Public Works asks people to dispose of their e-cigarettes in the multiple hazardous waste disposal sites across the county. You can also find out more information on waste disposal on the county's website at lessismore.org.

The proposed ban, SB 424, would apply only to single-use devices and create a take-back program for the reusable ones.

The latest [bill's history](#) on the state's website shows it was sent to the committee on health last month.



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Melissa Newman is a multi-media journalist for KSBY News. You can send her story ideas at mnewman@ksby.com.