


DCrew calls for Tobacco 21

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The Cochise County Youth Health Coalition, a group of local high school students, asked the City mayor and council to adopt a policy change that would raise the legal age to buy tobacco products from 18 to 21 in Douglas.

The coalition, also known as DCrew, made a presentation on their Tobacco 21 initiative at this month's mayor and council meeting, held on April 12 at City Hall.

The DCrew has been active in Douglas since 2011; and in 2015 they worked with the former mayor and council to adopt Airport Park as the first smoke-free park in the community.

This past year DCrew's 30 members volunteered nearly 1600 hours to the city through projects and initiatives like Dia de los Ninos, the Mayor's call to clean up Douglas, and Red Ribbon Week drug and substance abuse prevention.

During their non-action presentation at Wednesday's council meeting, the DCrew announced current statistics related to tobacco use, and diseases.

In 1964, the first Surgeon General's report to link cigarette smoking to cancer was released.

In those 53 years, more than 20 million Americans have died because of smoking. Broken down that is 6.58 million from cancer, 2.5 million were non-smokers, 108,000 were babies, 7.8 million from heart disease and metabolic diseases like diabetes, and 3.8 million from pulmonary disease.

"How much longer must we put up with this?" said Makenzie Duarte, DCrew. "How much longer before we stand up for our children? How much longer do we allow them to take our loved ones from us?"

The presenters noted that 480,320 U.S. deaths attribute each year to cigarette use and secondhand smoke.

"About 49,000 are deaths related to secondhand smoke," Kiara Hernandez, DCrew said. "Quitting tobacco improves your quality of life and reduces risk for developing tobacco-related diseases or premature death."

The high schoolers also provided statistics that singled-out middle and high school students in the United States, from 2011 to 2015.

Within that time period, 16 percent used electronic cigarettes, 9.3 percent used cigarettes, 8.6 percent cigars, 7.2 percent hookahs, and 5.6 percent smokeless cigarettes.

They added that about half of middle and high school students who used tobacco products in 2015 were current users of two or more tobacco products.

To bring awareness at a local level, the DCrew surveyed 1,318 of their peers at Douglas High School.

Of those who surveyed 79 percent were under the age of 18, and 21 percent were 18-years or older. The results were as follows.

When asked, 'how often do you smoke cigarettes or cigars?' 53 percent said never, 23 percent tried it once, 4 percent about once a month, 7 percent once a week, and 13 percent claimed they smoked every day.

When asked, 'how often do you smoke e-cigarettes and hookah?' 19 percent said everyday, 30 percent have tried once, and only 37 percent have never tried at all.

When asked, 'would you support a policy change to make the legal age to buy cigarettes raised from 18 to 21 in Douglas?' of all participants, 87 percent said yes and 13 percent said no.

"We continue to hear that at 18, if I am old enough to die for my country, I am old enough to smoke cigarettes," said Alex Duarte, DCrew.

The United States Army released the following quote on their website on the issue of tobacco—"Tobacco use is the leading cause of preventable death and disease and degrades the health and readiness of soldiers and the army family."

According to the Department of Defense Survey of Health-related behaviors (released Feb 2013) reports that approximately 50 percent of all service members use nicotine and 24 percent of those surveyed reported smoking cigarettes—compared to their civilian counterparts at 20.6 percent.

Tobacco cessation and tobacco-free living programs support the Army Surgeon General's Performance Triad initiative and Department of Defense (DOD) goal for tobacco-free installations by the year 2020.

"The Army's goal is to transform itself from a culture that tolerates smoking and tobacco use to an Army that supports disease prevention, healthy behaviors and lifestyle choices in support of the Healthy People 2020," Duarte reported.

During their presentation the group was asked by the council to explain why they chose the age of 21, and about how many lives they project they will save through this initiative.

Duarte explained that the brain goes through significant development between the ages of 18 and 21, and at that age young adults are more likely to make rational decisions. Also, raising the legal age to 21 would significantly lower the presence of tobacco users in the high schools.

Currently there are two states, Hawaii and California, along with more than 200 municipalities in the country that have passed Tobacco 21 ordinances.

Cottonwood was the first municipality in the state of Arizona to adopt such an ordinance, which passed May of last year.

The DCrew asked that a Tobacco 21 ordinance include all tobacco products including electronic nicotine delivery systems and e-juice. Although the council did not take action on the presentation, they applauded the efforts of the DCrew. It is anticipated that an ordinance will be placed on agenda at a future mayor and council meeting for further discussion.

For more information on this nationwide initiative, visit www.Tobacco21.org.