

# Toothless

## Missouri's laws do nothing to stem vape epidemic

By McKenna Casey  
Windsor High School

A school resource officer for the Windsor C-1 School District, who has seen the teen vaping epidemic firsthand, says Missouri's laws on vaping don't provide any help to solve the problem.

"You have all these (legislators) out writing laws saying, 'We've got to put a stop to this. We've got to do something.'

"So, they go out and put out this law that has zero teeth. What can we use this law for? What is it good for? Not much of anything," Jefferson County Sheriff's Deputy Will Scott said.

Scott, who has been a school resource officer at Windsor since the start of the 2018-2019 school year, said he is dismayed by vaping's grip on young people.

### Changing times

Ten years ago when someone heard the term "e-cigarette," an image might come to mind of an ugly, clunky and loud piece of equipment.

Today's e-cigarettes are called "vapes," and they are small, sleek and easy to carry around. Although the vaping industry has proclaimed the devices were intended as a means to help adult smokers quit, the younger generation has been



Kevin Carbery photo

**Deputy Will Scott discusses vape use and laws associated with the devices during a meeting with the Leader Teen Advisory Board.**

targeted through advertisement spaces on popular social media platforms.

JUUL, creator of the most popular e-cigarette devices, faced recent backlash for allegedly courting teens.

JUUL's website says its products are intended to "improve the lives of the world's one billion adult smokers by eliminating cigarettes."

However, more teens have been using the product than adults.

### How to get help

Until recently, there were few outlets for teens to find help to quit vaping. But, thanks to National Jewish Health hospital in Denver, Colo., an online program is available.

The organization's website, MyLifeMyQuit.com, is stacked with information about vaping and provides a self-help line for teens who want to quit using e-cigarettes.

The website says, "At My Life, My Quit we share the truth about nicotine, vaping and other tobacco products. If you decide you want to quit, we're here to help you do it successfully.

"Text 'Start My Quit' to 855.891.9989 or call to talk with a coach who is ready to listen and cheer you on.

"It's YOUR LIFE and we're here to help you live it YOUR WAY."

### What penalties?

Scott said Missouri's laws do nothing to keep teens away from e-cigarettes, although people under the age of 18 cannot legally buy them.

If a law enforcement officer catches an underage youth with a vape device, it is an infraction and the device can be confiscated, Scott said.

"For a second violation and any sub-

sequent violations, the person is guilty of an infraction, once again," he said. The violator's device can be confiscated and he or she "shall complete a tobacco education and smoking-cessation program, if available," Scott said.

Unfortunately, there currently is no cessation program for vaping.

Scott and others fear that vaping may lead to substance abuse.

One JUUL pod (a container that holds liquid with nicotine and other substances) is equivalent to a whole pack of cigarettes in terms of the amount of highly addictive nicotine it contains.

Flavors – from fruity to minty, to almost anything you can think of – make vaping seem appealing, but teens may not be aware of the potentially harmful chemicals in the pods and the juice.

The real trouble rolls in with pod modifications. Pod-mods are backroom concoctions mixed with anything the dealer wants to add. There is no way to regulate these modified pods before they hit the streets. Some are amped up, laced with THC (the chemical responsible for most of marijuana's psychological effects).

Scott said he can send confiscated pods to the Missouri State Highway Patrol crime lab to find out what is in them, but that isn't really helpful since it can take weeks for tests to be run and for the information to be sent back to him.

## IN OUR OPINION

# The unknown attracts

## Not knowing vaping's side effects doesn't erase them

By J.M Bradley  
De Soto High School graduate

Would you eat a candy bar if the side effects were unknown?

Would you swim in a pool if someone told you the chemicals in the water were unknown?

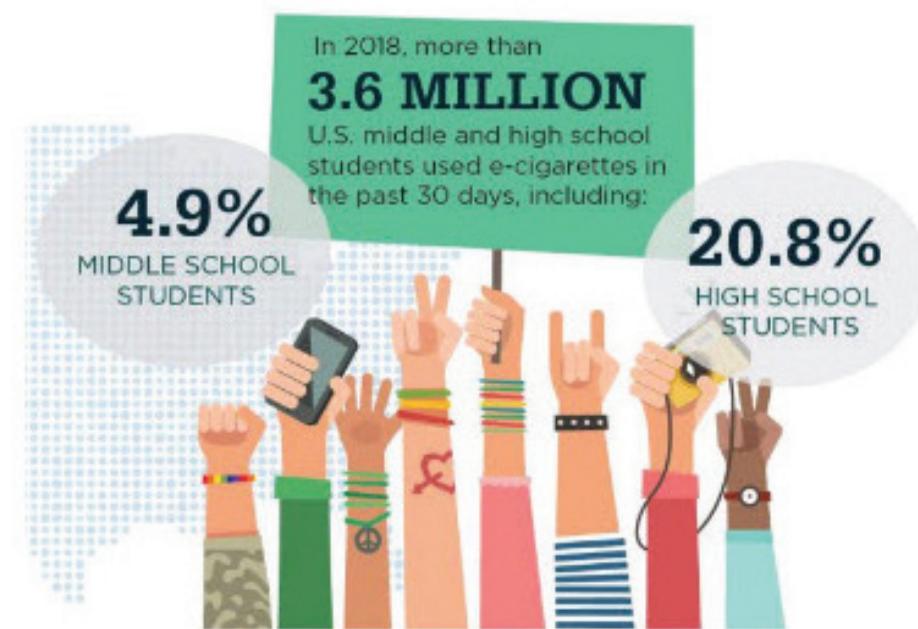
Most people would not do either, but the most daring of people probably would. Vaping is in many ways the same. Nobody knows the side effects from vaping because it's a new way of consuming nicotine.

So new, in fact, that doctors and government officials are not able to report possible side effects, because they are not yet observable in a large population.

Side effects cause people to weigh risk.

Most drivers wear seat belts, not only because it is the law, but because everyone has heard about or seen a terrible vehicle accident in which a seat belt might have saved a life.

Most Americans no longer smoke cigarettes because millions of people have seen close loved ones die from a smoking-



Source: Centers for Disease Control and Prevention

related illness.

Almost everyone in Western society can tell an individual about the risk of not wearing a seat belt and the risk of smoking – but not the unknown risk of vaping.

The unknown attracts.

The Wright Brothers would never have built the airplane if they had not been attracted to the unknown. Millions of American teenagers are the same way.

Perhaps there are massive, terrible side effects from vaping – just no evidence, yet. Decades ago, people did not know the dangers of smoking, and look how that turned out. Someday, use of e-cigarettes could have a similar outcome.

Millions of teenagers are joining the bandwagon, and vaping without worry, because side effects are unseen.

We've been taught since an early age about the negative effects of tobacco, after our elders witnessed the horrors smoking has caused for millions of people.

Tobacco use among teens is the lowest in history because people saw the suffering and took action to protect themselves and their children from that fate.

Smoking was immensely popular in the 1940s and 1950s, accepted everywhere in our culture. Its inherent harmfulness did not become apparent until the 1960s and 1970s. Millions took the risk back then, attracted by the unknown, and we all know how that ended.

I hope young people today do not make the same mistake, and don't realize it until decades down the road.

Sadly, that's what could happen.