

Campus turns blind eye to underage smokers

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Arts & Culture Editor

Smoking cigarettes is the No. 1 cause of preventable death in the United States, according to the Center for Disease Control and Prevention. It is also reported in recent federal studies that Oregon has the 11th highest smoker population nationwide. Many of those smokers are minors; 18 percent of Oregon children between 12 and 17 have smoked a cigarette in the past 30 days, according to the American Lung Association.

Places like Clackamas Community College's Oregon City campus are a haven for teenage smoking.

Some are underage CCC students, but many of the younger smokers seen huddling around campus smoking shelters and bumming cigarettes from strangers are from the neighboring campus of Oregon City High School.

It would appear that violating Oregon's statute on possession of tobacco products doesn't concern the minors who smoke or the adults providing access to cigarettes.

Seasoned smoker David Tucker, a local commuter, spends a lot of time near the smoking area on campus. While waiting for the bus five days a week, he is often approached by teenagers wanting cigarettes, he said. "If they obviously [look] old enough, I will [give them a cigarette]," said Tucker. "Other than that, no."

In a national study by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration monitoring the sale of tobacco to minors, Oregon came in dead last. The penalty for giving tobacco to a minor can reach up to \$500 because Oregon considers it "endangering the welfare of the child."

In the same study, New York came in at No. 15. The Empire State is setting the bar high in an effort to curb underage tobacco use. New York City approved a bill late last month that raised the legal age at which a person may buy tobacco products to 21. The controversial measure restricts the purchase of cigarettes, cigars and electronic cigarettes.

"I think it's a good idea," CCC transfer-degree student Christina Reichling said. "Why? Because I got started at a young age."

Ninety five percent of adult smokers first lit up when they were underage. Reichling remembers smoking as a minor, she said.

"I was 15 when my older sister brought home alcohol and cigarettes," Reichling said. "We got drunk and started smoking."

Some kids start even earlier. "I was 12, and everyone was doing it," said Tucker.

Smoking is illegal in all 50 states for any minor. Penalties

do not, however, deter teenagers from lighting up.

Suzy Isham, director of Campus Safety, explained that since CCC is an open campus, anyone is allowed on the property. If people are caught smoking outside of the smoking shelters located around campus, that's when Campus Safety officers start getting involved.

A store that sells cigarettes to minors is breaking the law, but Isham said they are not going to go after underage students who smoke on campus.

"We're not going around checking people's IDs who are lighting up," Isham said. "That just doesn't make sense. We have other things to do."

Reichling, for her part, faced stricter cops, she said. She was hit with a Minor in Possession charge when she was 17 and a student at Milwaukie High School, she said.

"I lit up a smoke and the cop busted me," Reichling said. "I went home with an M.I.P. ticket."

Oregon law is clear. The charge for tobacco possession by a minor is a Class D violation. Along with the ticket comes a \$100 fine. While it isn't an arresting offense, there are still legal consequences.

Michael Clark, communications specialist for the Oregon City School District, says there is a zero tolerance policy for possession or use of tobacco on any of its grounds.

"OCS D prohibits student use

of tobacco," Clark said. "And has board policy and administrative regulations to support all relevant laws."

The policy also covers school functions and all away-games and other off-campus events. Disciplinary action can be severe, up to and including expulsion and referral to law enforcement. Students found in possession of tobacco also face losing certain honors or privileges such as attending the senior prom or serving in student government. The faculty is routinely trained in how to handle situations where cigarettes and students collide. This policy is posted on the school districts website.

It raises several questions: Are these disciplinary measures making any difference? Oregon City Schools are maintaining their end of the responsibility, so what is CCC doing to help stop underage smoking? Is the college taking appropriate steps to stop the lawless actions of minors on campus?

Like New York, many states are making small steps toward encouraging the discontinuation of smoking. Why not Oregon? Only some of Oregon's colleges and universities maintain 100 percent tobacco-free campuses. CCC is obviously not on that list.

What is the appropriate course of action?

Turning a blind eye to our youth's tobacco use is definitely not a choice. Perhaps Oregon should lower or raise

the age at which tobacco can be purchased.

Eighteen is an important age. Most look on this chapter as the glory days of youth. Becoming more self-sufficient, learning a trade and living by standards set in newfound freedom are the icing on an authority-free cake. No mom, dad or anyone else dictating the new lifestyle ahead.

Along with adult privilege comes responsibility. Taking charge of this new life means wise decision-making, diligence in financial matters and every other part of mastering what fate has in store. Many brand-new adults and even those who have traversed the block a few times will make the choice to pick up a habit proven to be the No. 2 and No. 3 causes of death worldwide.

Would you like being one of those statistics?

— Additional information contributed by Patty Salazar



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CATO: Man about campus

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"For the first part you're paying to be here," said Cato. "So that changes things to such an extent that if I see someone on the street it's probably the worst day of their life, or can be compared to. Here if I have to talk to somebody, they want my help, to engage them and deal with these problems."

After going through a rigorous application process and, in a way, competing against the other applicants, Cato was chosen for the full-time slot. Isham was impressed with him, more so than any other applicant, and his familiarity with the campus helped as well. She is a big fan of loyalty, dedication, and commitment.

"He knows the campus and is a smart guy," Isham said. "I appreciate his enthusiasm and his wanting to be here. He really wants to be here. He loves this college and he rose to the occasion in the application process."

Since being hired, he has done as much extra training as he could to help prepare him for the position. He also wanted to build his confidence in his own ability to train others as part of the BERT program, composed of all staff members. On top of all this, Cato and his girlfriend, Vanessa Marson, are new parents to baby Timothy.

"The full-time job has helped out a lot," Marson said. "It's helping us out financially and with things we need for the baby.

And the regular schedule gives him more time with the boy."

Isham is pleased with Cato's work and enjoys watching him grow in his career and as a family.

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Suzy Isham
Director of Campus Safety

"It's fun to see how he's enjoying being a new dad, and being a parent and being in law enforcement, what it takes," said Isham. "The best part of working with Tim is his creativity and making it better here, doing everything he can to make sure that happens."

His interests outside of law enforcement are music, playing guitar and martial arts, anything that keeps his mind and body engaged. Being certified as an instructor for defensive tactics, Cato also volunteers his time assisting training of the Clackamas County Sheriff's Office's new hires and reserves.

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