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Texas A&M to implement tobacco-free campus policy in January

By Megan Rodriguez megan.rodriguez@theeagle.com Oct 13, 2019

Texas A&M University will implement a tobacco-free policy in January, using a \$20,000 grant from the American Cancer Society to help fund the effort.

This month, Texas A&M Chancellor John Sharp called on all system institutions to ban e-cigarettes, but the flagship campus has been working toward a tobacco-free environment since this summer. A&M Chief Wellness Officer Jay Maddock said the university applied for a grant in June and just received approval last week. Officials are still in the early planning stages, but Maddock said funds likely will support signage and social media campaigns to inform people about the policy changes.

Campus officials will meet this week to continue planning, and the policy will be rolled out next semester.

“Having a healthy environment is an important part of both learning and working,” Maddock said. “We are instituting ways that we can support the health of our faculty, staff and students. I think this is a good step forward in looking at a more comprehensive plan for

health and wellness.”

Smoking and vaping are already prohibited on most parts of campus. The rules require smokers to be 100 feet away from any building, so Maddock said the changes won't be significantly different than what is in place. However, the biggest challenge will be enforcing the rules at sporting events when there are people from out of town who are unaware of the changes.

Repercussions will remain the same as now, Maddock said — administrators and officials can remind violators of the rules and call the campus police if the person becomes hostile.

Since the American Cancer Society started the Tobacco-Free Generation Campus Initiative grant program in 2016, it has assisted 97 post-secondary institutions across the country as they adopt tobacco-free policies.

Director of Health Promotion Lauren Dorsett said she and her team will meet with Maddock this week to discuss their role in the process.

Health Promotion offers a wide variety of resources to students, including ways to help them quit smoking. Dorsett said some staff members at Health Promotion are trained in smoking cessation, and she also encourages anyone who wants to quit to reach out to Student Health Services as they can provide over-the-counter medication.

While there is no such thing as vaping cessation, Dorsett said some of the methods they use to wean people off of tobacco could be adapted to anyone who shows an interest in quitting e-cigarettes.

The websites YesQuit.org and SmokeFree.gov are run by other entities and Health Promotion recommends students visit the sites if they are interested in quitting tobacco products.

However, she said she is wary to put too many new resources out specifically for e-cigarettes before experts know exactly what is causing harm in relation to vaping.

Sharp cited the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention — which found that there were more than 800 cases of lung injury and 12 deaths across the nation among e-cigarette users — as the reason for the ban.

“I do not want to take any unnecessary chances with the health of our students, faculty and staff,” Sharp said in the memo.

But the CDC said the chemical exposure that causes the injuries associated with vaping is unknown, and there is not one single product that has been linked to every case. While the CDC advises people to refrain from vaping, returning to smoking is not recommended if someone is using e-cigarettes to quit. Additionally, anyone who vapes should avoid products with THC or CBD oils, as the CDC said they may be playing a role in the recent problems.

The FDA regulates vaping liquid, but Brazos County Health District Health Educator Mary Parrish told The Eagle last month that there is a possibility that people are buying products with prohibited ingredients.

“Highly toxic chemicals are banned; however, the issue is that with a lot of the e-juices that are made in China and sold at places like convenience stores, there’s no way of guaranteeing that they don’t have any of the banned chemicals,” Parrish said in September.

Even with recent uncertainties, many schools have banned vaping on their campuses for years, as it is often included in school’s anti-tobacco policies. Maddock said there are more than 2,000 other schools that are smoke or tobacco free. This includes the University of Texas System, which banned tobacco across all its 14 system institutions in 2017.

The same week that Sharp’s memorandum went out, Texas A&M Corpus Christi — which also received the American Cancer Society’s grant — put the vaping ban into effect.

“Generally speaking, I’m in support of opportunities for students making healthy choices about nicotine,” Dorsett said. “There are a lot of concerns about vaping and harm that could happen. I do think this could be a positive thing in promoting health and well-being for our students.”



Texas A&M University System to ban e-cigarettes at all facilities

