



State Lawmakers Consider Self-Extinguishing Cigarettes

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DENVER - Smokers in Colorado would have a new product to buy if some state lawmakers have their way.

Efforts are under way to require the sale of fire-safe cigarettes throughout the state in an effort to cut down on the fires which kill the most people nationwide every year, according to the National Fire Protection Agency.

That group is the leading advocate for self-extinguishing cigarettes nationwide.

Supporters of the proposal say two separate fires in Denver retirement homes this past weekend, likely caused by cigarettes, provide further evidence Colorado should require the sale of fire-safe cigarettes. Three people were injured in one of those fires, one critically.

"I think it's a safety issue first and foremost," said Sen. Bob Hagedorn (D-Aurora), who is Chairman of the Senate's Health and Human Services Committee and the sponsor of the proposed measure. "When you look at how many people die each year due to smoke inhalation and other injuries, it's reducing risk. It's saving people's lives."

New York became the first state to require the specific type of cigarette. Twenty-one other states have followed suit, including traditionally tobacco-friendly states like North Carolina and Kentucky, where ten people died in a house fire caused by an unattended cigarette earlier this year. The Canadian federal government requires that any cigarette sold in the country be self-extinguishing.

Tobacco companies have recently testified in favor of measures in Texas, Connecticut and Kentucky on the issue. Hagedorn says he has not spoken to their lobbyists here in Colorado just yet and no lawmakers have come out opposed to the measure.

"They seem to have accepted this," he said. "They haven't fought it and defeated it in the states where it's been introduced.

"One could say we're having an influence in the marketplace, but on the other hand, public safety and public health is a legitimate exercise of government power."

The Coalition for Fire-Safe Cigarettes, which represents numerous safety, firefighter and medical groups nationwide, states 700-900 people nationwide die each year in house fires caused by cigarettes. It has lobbied state legislatures to enact fire safe cigarette requirements and has been successful in enough states to cover more than half of the country's population.

Colorado state lawmakers will take up the issue when they return to work in January, 2008.