Published in final edited form as:

Tob Control. 2014 November ; 23(E2): e87–e88. doi:10.1136/tobaccocontrol-2013-051535.

E-cigarettes made especially for inmates

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Keywords

ENDS; e-cigarettes

Industry watch

The United States has the highest rate of incarceration in the world, at 751 per 100,000,(1) and almost 12 million people are admitted to local jails annually.(2) Smoking prevalence is estimated at 60-80% in U.S. criminal justice populations, about four times higher than in the general population.(3) Most jails ban conventional cigarette smoking to prevent contraband and associated violence, reduce the fire hazard and maintenance costs associated with cigarettes, and lower secondhand smoke exposure by nonsmoking prisoners.(4,5) Some jails, however, are experimenting with offering e-cigarettes for sale to inmates. Although some state correctional agencies have banned e-cigarette sales in *prison* commissaries (stores that sell provisions for inmates), policies vary for local (city or county) jails. County jails in Illinois, Tennessee, Alabama, Nebraska and Kentucky, for example, have begun to sell e-cigarettes to prisoners through commissaries.(6-10)

Jail administrators claim that sales of e-cigarettes raise revenue for programs and offset staffing costs while reducing problems associated with contraband cigarettes and increasing inmate morale.(8,10) E-cigarette distributors are reportedly lobbying local officials at state sheriffs' association meetings and leaving behind samples at penitentiaries, encouraging e-cigarette availability in jails.(10) Despite explosive growth in e-cigarette use by adults and youth,(11,12) data are limited on the safety and addictive potential of these products for users and those exposed to secondhand e-cigarette aerosols.(13)

Introducing these products in institutionalized settings can lead to unique risks; for example, prisoners can use the parts of the e-cigarette to create weapons or to hide drugs and other illicit substances.(14) In response to these safety concerns, at least three new brands of e-

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Contributorship statement: Laurel Curry and Youn Lee conceptualized the manuscript; Laurel Curry drafted the manuscript; Youn Lee and Todd Rogers provided feedback and edits on drafts of the manuscript.

Competing interests: There are no competing interests to report.

cigarettes targeted specifically at correctional facilities have been developed: *Crossbar*, *Lock-ups*, and *Precision Vapor*. The *New York Times* recently reported that Chinese and American manufacturers are making “jail safe” e-cigarettes in response to the demand.⁽¹⁰⁾

Crossbar E-cigarettes were developed for sale in the commissary of the Laurel County, Kentucky jail. Jailors discovered that inmates were using the hard metal casings of standard e-cigarettes to create weapons, so they designed and tested Crossbar E-cigarettes, “specifically for use by correctional facilities” (www.smokecrossbar.com). The Crossbar casing is made from “soft plastic” rather than metal, which limits its utility as a weapon. According to the company’s website, these new e-cigarettes not only increase revenue from commissary sales, but also decrease the presence of contraband, since “inmates no longer needed to try to sneak in tobacco.”

Lock-up E-cigarettes are marketed with similar claims, and highlights design features intended to give the brand a competitive advantage over Crossbar products. The Lock-up E-cigarette has a clear casing designed to lower the risk of contraband being hidden inside the product (<http://www.lock-ups.com/about.php>). The website features a promotional YouTube video demonstrating how illegal substances can be hidden in a Crossbar E-cigarette. In response, Crossbar now offers a clear casing option. Likewise, Precision Vapor’s e-cigarette offers “All Plastic housing designed for safety in Jails” (<http://louisvillevaporshop.com/>).

The impact of prison and jail tobacco control policies on prisoner smoking behaviors is understudied.⁽¹⁵⁾ Tobacco use bans are not often accompanied by cessation assistance for inmates,⁽³⁾ and the introduction of e-cigarettes has the potential to change this landscape. It will be important to monitor the impact of the increasing availability of electronic nicotine delivery systems (ENDS) to jail and prison populations on several factors specific to this unique environment, such as smoking behaviors during incarceration and after release, the implementation of smoking bans in jails and prisons, cigarette black markets in jails and prisons, exposure to secondhand aerosol, use of ENDS to administer other drugs and transport contraband, and inmate actions to weaponize device components.

Acknowledgments

Funding: This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

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