

County snuffs cigarette machines

By GREG BEEBE
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SANTA CRUZ — The Board of Supervisors, deducing that children can't smoke what they can't get, voted Tuesday to ban cigarette vending machines at virtually everywhere in the county's unincorporated area, including bars.

The supervisors heard testimony from public and private health officials, school district researchers and children detailing how the machines are a primary source of cigarettes for those under age 18.

The law goes a step further than an earlier draft ordinance, which allowed cigarette vending machines in bars. The law comes on the heels of a similar ordinance passed last month by the Watsonville City Council.

Before joining her colleagues in unanimously approving the law, Supervisor Robley Levy called the ordinance "an appropriate step in terms of the public

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'His vending machines, his cigarettes, are killing my friends.'

— Jessica Lewis, 12,
testifying to county supervisors

health and welfare."

Under the ordinance, which the supervisors approved in concept, the machines would be prohibited in public transportation facilities, reception areas, restaurants, retail stores, retail service establishments, retail food production and marketing establishments, waiting rooms, service clubs, public or private cafeterias, or any work place or work area.

Two men who own vending-machine businesses argued that the law steps on the toes of free enterprise, especially the provision which outlaws cigarette machines in bars.

Robert Orcutt, owner of Valley Vending, said if a minor goes into a bar to plop coins into a cigarette machine, "the owner of the bar has a problem." He called vending-machine sales of smokes a personal freedom and decried the use of a "blanket law" to stop it.

Ron Shaffer, owner of Santa Cruz Vending, said, "In my eight years of vending, I've never seen a child use a (cigarette) machine." Shaffer said if the board was going to outlaw cigarette sales from vending machines, it should also outlaw convenience-store tobacco sales.

Supervisor Jan Beautz said the day's most convincing testimony came from two young Branciforte Junior High students.

One of the students, Jessica Lewis, 12, told the board members, "Most of my friends smoke."

A surprised Supervisor Gary Patton asked, "Most of your friends?"

Lewis said the main supply of pre-teen cigarettes came from machines. She gestured toward cigarette vendor Shaffer and said, "His vending machines, his cigarettes, are killing my friends."

Betsy McCarty, the county's chief of public health, called the ordinance "one more plank in the smoke-free platform."

Doug Fakkema of the county Drug Abuse Commission said studies have shown tobacco to be a "gateway drug," and that children who smoke often graduate to other vices.

Elinor Hall, the county's Health Services Administrator, said the city of Santa Cruz is "quite close" to enacting a similar ban and that Scotts Valley and Capitola are "in the talking stages."