

✓ CIGARETTE MACHINES

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Santa Cruz bans most cigarette machines

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Hoping to cut down on children's access to cigarettes, the Santa Cruz City Council on Tuesday voted to ban cigarette vending machines at most places throughout the city.

The ban, which passed a first reading and will come up for a final vote in two weeks, follows similar measures passed this summer in Scotts Valley, Watsonville and the unincorporated areas of the county.

Although everyone who spoke on the topic agreed that the intention of the new regulations was noble, many health professionals and educators left disappointed.

After 30 minutes of emotional debate from the audience, council members narrowly decided to adopt the less stringent of two options before them, allowing an exception in which the 14 bars in Santa Cruz that do not serve food will be allowed to keep the machines.

Those machines will be allowed to stay, but under the proposed law will work only with tokens sold from behind the bar. San Jose has such a token system to discourage minors from using the machines.

A vote to ban the machines altogether failed 4-3, largely because of vocal testimony from many of the tavern owners.

Charging that "no one has ever produced a sliver of proof" that children under 18 enter bars to buy cigarettes,

Beverly Mathis-Swanson, owner of One Double Oh Seven on Soquel Avenue, said that a complete ban would unfairly hurt the business of bar owners and inconvenience their patrons who smoke.

Because state law requires that bars that do not serve food cannot admit anyone under 21, minors rarely, if ever, come near cigarette machines in bars anyway, she said.

"The answer is in education in the home and the schools, not in removing our vending machines," she said.