Oregon's fire-safe cigarette legislation passes house

by Bend_Weekly_News_Sources

(Salem, Oregon) The Oregon House of Representatives today approved a measure that would allow only â€œfire-safeâ€• cigarettes to be sold in the state. The bill, which passed on a unanimous 58-0 vote in the House, requires the State Fire Marshal to determine if a cigarette variety meets the reduced ignition propensity guidelines.

â€œPreventable deaths like the ones caused from cigarette fires are the most tragic,â€• said House Speaker Jeff Merkley (D-Portland). â€œThis is simple technology that will save hundreds of lives in Oregon.â€•

Fire-safe cigarettes work by using two or three thin bands of less-porous paper in the wrapper that act as â€œspeed bumpsâ€• to slow down a burning cigarette. A conventional cigarette will continue to burn when left unattended. But a fire-safe cigarette, left unattended, will extinguish when the burning tobacco reaches one of these speed bumps. Photo: National Institute of Standards and Technology
Cigarette-related fires are the leading cause of home fire deaths and injuries in Oregon. From 2001 through 2005, there are 103 injuries and 29 fatalities from cigarette-ignited home fires. Across the country, more than 700 people die annually from smoking-related residential fires.

â€œIâ€™m really proud of everyone who came together to make this a collaborative effort,â€• said Rep. Patti Smith (R-Corbett). â€œOregonâ€™s cigarette-related fires will be significantly reduced through the adoption of these fire-safe cigarette standards.â€•

Oregon was the first state in the country to consider establishing safety standards for cigarettes. The 1979 Legislature passed a memorial asking Congress to create and enforce safety standards.

â€œWe have been waiting 26 years for federal legislation. Congress has still failed to act, so states must step up to the plate,â€• said Rep. Diane Rosenbaum (D-Portland), who carried the bill on the floor. â€œIt is time for Oregon to join the list of states who are taking proactive measures to prevent these devastating fires.â€•

â€œPublic fire safety education is effective, but there is a problem it cannot solve,â€• State Fire Marshal Nancy Orr wrote in a letter to House members. â€œMost of those who die in cigarette caused fires in Oregon are smokers impaired in some way or are innocent victims living in the same home or adjoining apartment.â€•

The bill now goes to the Senate. A committee hearing date has not been set.

If the bill becomes law, Oregon would join New York, Vermont, California, Illinois, New Hampshire, Massachusetts and Canada in requiring the sale of only fire-safer cigarettes.

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