

# Vancouver considers ordinance to keep bongos, pipes hidden at convenience stores



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Advocacy groups have encouraged Vancouver and Clark County governments to restrict the sale of drug paraphernalia in convenience stores. Vick's Market, in an effort to keep the items out of children's sight, has created a separate smoke shop.

It soon might be a little harder to know whether your local convenience store carries glass bongos, pipes and other drug paraphernalia.

The Vancouver city attorney's office is working on a draft ordinance that would require convenience stores to keep drug paraphernalia out of sight and in a secure area -- and to sell it only to people 18 and older.

The City Council could consider the ordinance as early as March. It's currently being reviewed by Clark County's government.

"We like the county to join in ordinances to have uniformity throughout the urban area," says city attorney Ted Gathe.

The ordinance would be a victory for PREVENT!, a local substance-abuse-prevention coalition, which has been pursuing restrictions on the sale of drug paraphernalia for two years. The organization made a presentation to the Vancouver City Council in January, where it urged the council to pass an ordinance that would prohibit children from buying paraphernalia. Tacoma and Spokane have passed similar ordinances.

Supporters of the proposed ordinance say the presence of drug paraphernalia in convenience stores - typically marketed as tobacco pipes and often displayed near candy and gum -- sends a message to children "about what is acceptable."

"By allowing drug paraphernalia, we're saying it's OK (to use drugs), even though it's illegal," said Tom Breitenbauch, executive director of **Hands Across the Bridge**, an advocacy group for people in recovery. "It's an unspoken message."

Breitenbauch also says recovering addicts can be triggered when they see paraphernalia, tempting them to go back to drugs.

But the Vancouver City Council has been hesitant to regulate the sale of bong and similar items, which are considered paraphernalia only when they have the residue of an illegal drug in them. Otherwise, the sale of bong, pipes and other such objects is perfectly legal.

Vancouver city councilors told the PREVENT! coalition to seek the support of the business community and neighborhood associations. "To be quite honest, I'm not sure where our community is (on the issue)," said Councilman Larry Smith. "I would rather hear more from the community."

Sondra Storm, the coalition's director, says PREVENT! has spoken with two dozen neighborhood associations. "We definitely have the support and interest from neighborhood associations, especially the ones with stores that sell drug paraphernalia," she said.

Bud Van Cleve, president of the East Hazel Dell neighborhood association, says there is drug activity in his neighborhood that affects the whole community. As long as paraphernalia is available, he says, it will encourage drug use.

"It's a poison to the community," he said. "We don't need to encourage it."

About 22 percent of convenience stores in Clark County sell drug paraphernalia, according to a survey the coalition conducted of every store that has a tobacco license. Neighborhoods with high poverty rates have a higher prevalence of stores that sell paraphernalia.

"It's a small minority that actually are selling paraphernalia," Storm said. "But of the ones that are, they tend to be concentrated in a couple (areas). There is some unfair exposure going on."

The coalition has asked store owners if they would be willing to stop selling the paraphernalia. "What we've heard," Storm said, "is that we are going to sell it as long as it is legal."

**PREVENT! and its youth arm STASHA, or Strong Teens Against Substance Hazards and Abuse, are now trying to reach out to other cities in Clark County about drug paraphernalia ordinances.**