

Earlsboro S.W.A.T. team passes tobacco-free policy

In Pottawatomie County, the use of smokeless or spit tobacco is a serious problem.

The Pottawatomie Alliance Toward Community Health, or PATCH, is highlighting the harmful effects of smokeless tobacco during Through With Chew Week—which began Feb. 14 and concluded Feb. 20—and at the annual Great American Spit Out, which was held Feb. 18.

The important message is that smokeless tobacco doesn't mean harmless tobacco.

Local Students Working Against Tobacco (SWAT) teams work toward changing the social norms around tobacco use at their schools in creative ways.



Recently, the Earlsboro SWAT team passed a 24-hour/seven-day tobacco-free policy that affected their entire campus.

With the support of their entire school board, and SWAT adult partners, the policy passed and the team immediately began their work of educating their peers, younger students, staff and family members of the harms of using all tobacco products.

The team used “palm cards” passed out at the home basketball games as one of the imaginative ways of educating visitors on the new 24/7 policy.

The cards had a game schedule on one side and a thank you message for not using tobacco on the campus grounds.

The message is one of spreading education and exposing lies from the big tobacco companies. Tobacco is the only product on the market that has the potential to kill if used as directed.

“If you really want to know the effects of smokeless tobacco products, ask your dentist,” Jennifer Birchett, PATCH chairperson, said.

“They know about the pre-cancerous lesions, gum disease and disfigurement or death from oral cancer. In fact, The American Cancer Society reports that an estimated 80 percent of oral cancer is caused by tobacco use.”

At the Great American Spit Out, Pottawatomie Alliance Toward Community Healthy encouraged Oklahomans who use smokeless products to quit for at least one day.

To assist smokeless tobacco users in quitting, PATCH recommends calling the Oklahoma Tobacco Helpline at 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669).

“Smokeless tobacco may not receive the same kind of attention that smoking cigarettes does, but that should not detract from the fact that it's a harmful product that leads to nicotine addiction and causes cancer,” Birchett said. “Calling it ‘cherry’ or ‘spice’ or ‘wintergreen’ only disguises the carcinogens like arsenic and formaldehyde that are inserted into the tobacco during the fermenting and aging process.”

Through With Chew Week is a national educational awareness week designed to get people talking about smokeless tobacco use and increase awareness of the negative health effects of using chew.

Thursday, Feb. 18 was the Great American Spit Out, a day to help smokeless tobacco users kick the habit. Among Oklahoma adults, 5.4 percent, or about 130,000, currently use smokeless tobacco.

It's not just adults who choose to use tobacco however.