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# On eve of Smokeout, Easthampton classes offered wake-up call

By CATHERINE BAUM Staff Writer

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EASTHAMPTON - With all the anti-smoking campaigns undertaken over the years, you'd think the facts about how dangerous smoking is would have reached their intended targets: young people.

When it comes to the nitty gritty details like feeling out of breath all the time and cold extremities due to decreased circulation, well, turns out that's news to some students at Easthampton High School.

"I always knew smoking was bad," said senior Julie Volpe. "This really opened my eyes that it's a lot worse than it seemed to be."

Carissa Freniere, 16, who has smoked for five years and now lights up four to five cigarettes a day, says the habit is a stress reliever. She smokes before and after school, when she gets home from school, after she eats, after she showers, and after sports games when she used to play. She's noticing the effects, including feeling cold feet and hands.

"I hate being cold all the time," she said.

And there are others. "I already can feel pressure in my chest," she said. "It hurts."

Making those connections was the point of school assemblies held Tuesday in the music room. Health teacher Nancy Dunn and the student group Students Against Destructive Decisions, presented the event to persuade smokers to quit and non-smokers to not start. She said the timing was right, with November Lung Cancer Awareness Month and today the Great American Smokeout.

How to respond to student smokers has long been a troublesome topic for high schools and Easthampton is no different. When school officials recently moved student smokers who had informally congregated at the corner of Williston Avenue to a designated area near Daley Field, parents were unhappy, saying with its bench, waste basket and shade, it was almost inviting student smoking.

But EHS Principal Vito Perrone, who noted that smoking is prohibited on school grounds, said that is not the case. Officials simply felt the clusters of students amid traffic on Williston Avenue was a dangerous situation.

"I really want people to understand that we're not condoning smoking," Perrone said. "We just want people to be safe."



GORDON DANIELS

Easthampton High School sophomore Manny Morales, a member of the EHS group Students Against Destructive Decisions, addresses an assembly the group organized Tuesday to educate about the dangers of smoking.



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He conceded that critics maintain the smoking area is a tacit endorsement, and for that reason, he believes Tuesday's assembly is a good counterpoint.

"We really wanted to balance the perceived message on smoking that the school sent," said principal Vito Perrone.

Tuesday's assembly included a short film featuring smokers who had missing voice boxes and missing jaw bones, inhalers in their hands and oxygen tubes up their noses, each sharing how the habit took away their money, looks and life. Doctors and scientists ticked off the myriad physical symptoms caused by tobacco on mouths, hearts and lungs.

A woman with emphysema said "you feel like you're always holding your breath" while baseball players who chewed tobacco warned that the habit could result in "hairy tongue" conditions. With a voice over from an oral surgeon saying "you could comb it, you could part it," these so-called hairy tongue images drew startled "ew" sounds from students.

Students also saw evidence that smokers' hands stay colder much longer than those of non-smokers due to reduced oxygen levels in the smoker's blood.

After the film, students lined up on stage to recite more facts: nicotine is more addicting than cocaine or heroin; a person standing next to someone smoking for eight hours might as well have smoked a cigarette; Americans buy 10 million cigarettes a minute; the average smoker loses 13 to 14 more years of life than the average non-smoker.

Tenth grader Manny Morales said most of his family smokes and to help them quit, he puts pictures of himself, his sisters and their children on their cigarette boxes.

Meanwhile, Freniere said she has been trying to quit for some time now, but "it's hard." Ultimately, Freniere said she would quit if her parents refused to buy cigarettes for her, if when she asked them they would "just say no."

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