

Emphasis

Despite increased evidence of its danger

Smokeless tobacco is popular with Elon men

By Kami Brooks
Emphasis Editor

Copenhagen, Skoal, Red Man and Work Horse.

What comes to mind when you hear these names?

Copenhagen and Skoal are finely ground tobaccos that used to be called snuff. Red Man and Work Horse are coarser, chewing tobaccos. Today these products are called "smokeless tobaccos," and an estimated 22 million Americans use them, compared to 15,000 a few years ago, according to the American Council on Health and Science, a nonprofit educational association.

Critics say users run a high risk of getting oral cancer. In a recent broadcast of CBS' "60 Minutes," a reporter talked with the mother of a 19-year-old who had used smokeless tobacco and died of oral cancer. Sean Marsee of Ada, Okla., died after having used smokeless tobacco for nine months.

Mrs. Marsee said, "My son probably wouldn't have used it if a warning label had been on the can." She said her son "felt like it was all right to use it because it wouldn't be advertised so much otherwise."

Mrs. Marsee is suing U. S. Tobacco Co. for \$37 million.

More than 500 deaths have been reported in the United States due to the use of smokeless tobacco.

Advertising Strategy

The advertising industry is promoting the product, especially with the use of athletes and former sports stars. Walt Garrison, actor and former Dallas Cowboys football star, told "60 Minutes" that "the worst thing I can think of as far as smokeless tobacco is concerned is that you have to expectorate." He said the Skoal company, whose product he advertises, has never told him of any dangers that Skoal may have.

Other celebrities who advertise smokeless tobacco include country and western musician Charlie Daniels and baseball stars Bobby Murcer and Carlton Fisk.

Dr. James H. Edwards, a Raleigh dentist, discussed the effects of smokeless tobacco among his patients in a written statement. According to Edwards, "It is not unusual to see tissue change in the areas of the cheeks where the tobacco is held. This change is classified as leukoplakia and usually it will disappear when the irritant is removed."

"If the irritant (tobacco) continues to be used," Edwards add-

ed, "then other changes such as cancerous lesions are likely to appear."

The Health Research Group, a Washington-based consumer organization, wants the Federal Trade Commission to require smokeless tobacco manufacturers to warn consumers that the products may cause oral cancer. The American Dental Association is also calling for warning labels to be put on the products.

FTC's Options

The Federal Trade Commission has asked Surgeon General Everett Koop to investigate the dangers of smokeless tobacco. The FTC request for a new investigation, however, is viewed by Dr. Sidney Wolfe, head of the Health Research Group, as "another delay on the part of the government."

"The surgeon general already states that smokeless tobacco causes cancer, so I don't understand why they are delaying, what should have been done long ago, with another scientific review," Wolfe said.

The FTC has three approaches that it can take in regard to smokeless tobacco: develop a legislative proposal for action by Congress, bring individual cases against tobacco firms, or develop



Photos by Joe Coco

WANT A PLUG?: Larry Rhodes (left) and Brad Comer find themselves chewing tobacco in their spare time.

a general set of rules and regulations for tobacco ads.

Despite the various health reports and documented cases of oral cancer among users, smokeless tobacco seems increasingly popular. Several students at Elon who use smokeless tobacco were interviewed about their use of the product.

Mike Simonelli, who said he has been using smokeless tobacco for 11 years, said, "I use it mostly when I am playing baseball because it relaxes me." He said he uses Levi Garrett and Skoal.

He said, "I use one can every two weeks when I'm not playing baseball, but when baseball season comes around, I use two cans per week."

Simonelli also smokes cigarettes and says he "smokes less" when he chews. He hasn't experienced any mouth trouble with the use of these products. Most of his friends also chew, he said, but added, "My mom gets mad if I leave a can around the house."

Users' Views

George Poulos, who has been using smokeless tobacco for six years, said, "I started using smokeless tobacco regularly because I tried it one day and liked it. It is easier to use than cigarettes and smoke doesn't get in your way." He said he is trying to cut down on his use because he has experienced some gum trouble.

Art Griffin, a smokeless tobacco user for six years, said he finds

the product "relaxing." Comparing smokeless tobacco to cigarettes, Griffin said, "Smokeless tobacco is less dangerous because you're not creating any smoke which harms others."

He said, "If there is any harm done, it is to yourself."

Larry Rhodes has been using smokeless tobacco for three years because, he said, "cigarettes are messy and disgusting." He said he has had no problems with his teeth; however, he admitted his gums have receded. But he isn't very worried about getting oral cancer, saying, "If I get it, I get it."

Most of the Elon men interviewed for this article admitted to using smokeless tobacco on the average of one can per week. They agreed that women think it is disgusting to use smokeless tobacco and so they try not to chew while dating.

An employee of Cloverleaf Food Market near the college said that Copenhagen is the best seller among the smokeless tobaccos. It is kept in the freezer to insure freshness, she said. She added that the store's owner makes a trip to the warehouse to get fresh tobacco two to three times a week.

"The profits for the tobacco aren't all that great," she said. The cost of a can of smokeless tobacco ranges from 90 cents to \$1.23, depending on where it is purchased. "But we get a lot of students in here who may purchase other items when they get their tobacco," the Cloverleaf employee said.



GROUP CHEW: Elon students (left to right) Art Griffin, Troy Harris, Jamey Behler and Jim Binner get together for a chew and a talk.