

Look beyond first sensation

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BARROW — Smokeless tobacco has been a problem at the doorsteps of many teens across America.

In today's world and social climate teens are becoming more susceptible to the uses of tobacco for many reasons. These reasons vary from peer pressure and social acceptance to self-inquisitiveness and plain stupidity.

The fact remains that these reasons are not sound. If teens would take the necessary time to investigate the situation, they would see the negative long-term effects.

When one begins to "chew" or "dip" one may feel a slight high. Maybe that is the enjoyment, but one should look further. This sensation indicates that the tobacco is beginning its destructive course in the body and mind. The chemicals extracted from the tobacco secrete into the soft inner tissues of the cheek and lower lip of the mouth.

After being absorbed, leukoplakia, a white leathery patch begins to form.

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The tobacco juices also affect the gums and teeth. It may cause gums to recede and teeth to discolor, often becoming yellowish-brown.

The most threatening part of all this is that oral cancer can be the result.

These facts alone should make it all the more frightening for the average teen of today. One should not reason that "everybody else is doing it so why not me?" or "It makes me look and feel cool to 'chew' or 'dip.' "

Believing the statistics is extremely important. Thinking that smokeless tobacco is not as harmful to your health as cigarettes is another fallacy.

Research has shown that smokeless tobacco is just as harmful as nicotine. Although laws may be passed to forbid a minor to use tobacco, many ignore these regulations and continue to use tobacco.

The one thing that one should know is that as one ages, it becomes even more difficult to alleviate the problem of tobacco use. The younger one starts to realize what is happening in one's body, the wiser and healthier one will be in the long run.

In my hometown of Barrow, the city ordinance states that minors under the age of 16 cannot be lawfully sold tobacco products. The Alaska state law states that anyone selling or giving tobacco or its products to a minor is in violation of the law. These laws are one of many attempts to control the problem and prevent teens from ruining their health and lives.

All teen-agers should become aware, wake up and realize what they are doing to themselves. Teens can solve this problem and help others to do the same.