

## **AB 762 is a Critical Step to Safeguard California’s Health and Environment**

By Sunha Park

California sells an estimated 12 million disposable vapes each month, and nearly all end up in public waste streams, where lithium-ion batteries spark fires and toxic chemicals leach into soil and water<sup>1</sup>. These same devices are now the primary driver of youth nicotine use, engineered for high-dose delivery and marketed through flavors and social trends that target minors. At every stage, from retail to disposal, disposable vapes impose public health, environmental, and worker-safety risks. Continuing to allow their sale is a policy choice that contradicts California’s own tobacco control and environmental protection goals.

The hazards of disposable vapes extend far beyond the point of sale. According to industry fire protection experts, lithium-ion batteries embedded in these devices are frequently punctured during waste collection and processing, triggering thermal runaway fires. These occurrences have increased by over 20% in recent years<sup>2</sup>. These fires not only injure sanitation workers but also cause costly shutdowns and disruptions at recycling and waste management facilities across the U.S. and Canada, diverting vital resources from climate-resilient infrastructure efforts. Additionally, disposable vapes release harmful substances including toxic metals, glycols, and nicotine residues that contaminate stormwater systems and local ecosystems<sup>3</sup>. These environmental exposures disproportionately affect public-sector workers and low-income communities situated near landfills and transfer stations<sup>7</sup>. Considering the intersection of worker safety, environmental degradation, and public health risk, these findings highlight the critical need for proactive regulation, such as AB 762, to prevent hazardous single-use devices from entering the waste stream altogether.

Advocates of vaping often promote e-cigarettes as a safer alternative for adult smokers seeking to quit combustible tobacco. However, this narrative is misleading and oversimplified. Vaping carries its own significant health risks, including cardiovascular, respiratory, metabolic, and oral diseases, as well as cancer<sup>4</sup>. The International Pediatric Association’s recent position paper and multiple peer-reviewed studies, including those published in the American Journal of Public Health, conclusively find that e-cigarettes are not effective harm-reduction tools for nicotine-naive populations and pose substantial risks to youth. Instead of helping smokers quit, many users become dual users or remain dependent on nicotine long-term<sup>5</sup>. The aggressive marketing of high-nicotine disposable devices, which are designed to be discreet, easy to use, and appeal to youth, has fueled a troubling surge in youth addiction, posing new challenges to ongoing tobacco control efforts. Furthermore, these disposable products contribute disproportionately to environmental and public health harms, with their toxic waste and fire hazards posing additional risks beyond individual users. Taken together, the evidence demonstrates that vaping, particularly through disposable products, should not be framed as a harmless or effective cessation tool, but rather as a public health challenge requiring urgent regulatory intervention.

As for concerns that banning disposable vapes will fuel black-market growth or drive users back to cigarettes, California’s experience with the flavored tobacco ban offers clear evidence to the

contrary. Between 2019 and 2024, e-cigarette sales fell by 37% and cigarette sales by 11%, with no increase in illicit market activity or sales in neighboring states<sup>6</sup>. This strongly indicates that a similar ban on disposable vapes will effectively reduce harmful usage without triggering the negative consequences opponents predict. Moreover, well-designed regulatory frameworks can mitigate unintended effects while maximizing public health benefits, reinforcing that AB 762's ban on disposable vapes represents a critical step in the right direction toward reducing harm and protecting vulnerable populations.

Although California has taken significant steps to address the harms caused by disposable vapes, the passage of AB 762 remains uncertain as it awaits further consideration. This critical moment calls on voters, parents, educators, healthcare providers, and public health advocates alike, to raise their voices and demand swift, decisive action. Supporting AB 762 means protecting our youth from nicotine addiction, safeguarding frontline workers from dangerous waste hazards, and preserving our environment from toxic pollution. Now is the time to engage with your local representatives, express your support for this essential legislation, and hold policymakers accountable to prioritize health and safety over industry profits. Together, we can ensure that California not only sets the standard for tobacco control but also champions a sustainable and equitable future free from the devastating impact of disposable vape products.

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Sunha Park is a graduate of the University of California, Los Angeles, where she earned a Bachelor of Science in Human Biology and Society. Throughout her undergraduate career, she demonstrated a steadfast commitment to youth wellness, actively advocating for healthier communities through education, service, and leadership. She currently volunteers with UCLA Health's Department of Medicine as a member of the Anti-Vaping Champions Project, an initiative dedicated to advancing the Tobacco Endgame and protecting future generations from nicotine addiction. As a task force member, Ms. Park contributes to public health efforts that bridge health policy and community engagement. Driven by a deep passion for health equity, she aspires to become a physician and to pursue a career at the intersection of medicine, research, and public health, where she can create meaningful, lasting impact.

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