



South Royalton fifth-graders display the 788 discarded cigarette butts they picked up on the town green. It was yucky for them. Meanwhile members of the SRHS S.A.D.D. group are pushing the town's selectboard to ban smoking on the green. (Herald / Provided)

Students Petition for a Smoke-Free Green

By Laurie Smith

On a recent Friday afternoon, South Royalton fifth graders trekked from school to the picturesque Town Green for a service project—picking up littered cigarette butts.

Donning gloves, the students fanned out across the green and collected discarded butts, exclaiming “Ewww!” and “I can’t believe how many there are!” as they worked.

The clean-up yielded a stunning 788 discarded cigarettes in 30 minutes, which students deemed, “gross” and “repulsive.”

Fortunately for the fifth graders, some of their high school counterparts are working to keep Royalton’s green clean long-term.

The school’s Students Against Destructive Decisions group is spear-heading an initiative to ban smoking on the green and town

athletic fields.

During the last two months, S.A.D.D. students have worked with Health Connections of the Upper Valley, a local nonprofit committed to reducing tobacco use in our region, to better understand the health effects of second-hand smoke and the environmental impact of discarded cigarettes.

S.A.D.D. students unanimously agreed to pursue a no-smoking ordinance to protect the health of children in the community.

Group members noted the irony that Royalton currently bans dogs from the town green, (with a sign that explains the ban is intended, “to ensure the health and safety of the public”) while allowing smoking.

In addition to studying the issue, students circulated a petition in school and around Royalton asking the selectboard to enact a no-smoking ordinance.

The S.A.D.D. initiative culminated in a presentation to Royalton’s Selectboard on April 12. The students’ presentation highlighted key facts about second-hand smoke.

They noted that more than two million people have died as a result of second-hand smoke since 1964, from illnesses such as heart disease, cancer, and stroke.

Students also pointed out that children are especially vulnerable to second-hand smoke and can develop asthma, ear infection, and even Sudden Infant Death Syndrome from exposure to the thousands of chemicals in smoke.

E-cigarette aerosol was also deemed unsafe due to its high levels of formaldehyde and other known carcinogens.

In short, S.A.D.D. member Cameron Kimball explained, “There is no safe amount of second-hand smoke.”

At the end of the S.A.D.D. pre-

sentation, South Royalton fifth graders shared the three jars full of cigarette butts their class collected and asked the selectboard to seriously consider the S.A.D.D. proposal to enact a no-smoking ordinance on the green and town fields.

Selectboard members commented that the display of cigarette litter was “very powerful.” They praised all their students for their efforts and promised to hold a discussion about the ordinance at a future meeting.

Laurie Smith is a community outreach coordinator for Health Connections of the Upper Valley, which has a mission to reduce obesity and tobacco use in the region. Activities such as cooking classes, policy initiatives, and tobacco education with kids throughout the White River Valley SU, are grant-funded. Smith is also a member of the Royalton School Board.