

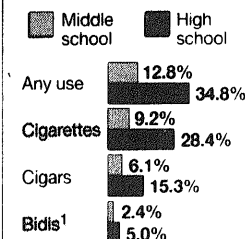
# NATIONLINE

## Number of teens using tobacco called alarming

One of eight middle-school students use tobacco at least once a month, and one of five high-school boys smoke cigars, according to the most comprehensive survey on teen usage of all tobacco products. The survey, released Thursday, is the first to look at tobacco use by middle-school students.

### Youth tobacco use

Those who used a tobacco product one or more times within 30 days of survey:



1. Small, flavored cigarettes from India. Source: National Youth Tobacco Survey, 1999. The American Legacy Foundation.

By Grant Jarboe for The A.P.

favored cigarettes have become nearly as popular as smokeless tobacco. Five percent of high-school students say they smoke bidis — tiny, often unfiltered cigarettes from India at least once a month. Slightly more smoke clove cigarettes, known as kreteks. Participating in the \$2 million survey were 15,000 students at 131 schools. The survey was completed in October and commissioned by the American Legacy Foundation, a non-profit group created by the tobacco settlement agreement of 1998 between the tobacco industry and 46 states. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention will publish the findings today on the Internet ([www.cdc.gov/tobacco](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco)).

Wendy Koch

**GRANDPARENTS' RIGHTS:** Florida's Supreme Court struck down part of a state law that gave grandparents the power to seek court-ordered visitation with their grandchildren. The decision is the third time the court has said the state can't go against a parent's wishes.

All 50 states have laws allowing grandparents and others to seek visitation after divorces or under other circumstances. The U.S. Supreme Court, in a challenge to a Washington state law, is looking at the conflict between a state's desire to promote children's best interests and parents' right to raise their children free from government interference. Visitation laws in other states have usually survived court challenges.



Riley: Mayor wants flag taken down.

**BATTLE FLAG BATTLE:** Two South Carolina mayors opened a Web site in their effort to get the Confederate battle flag removed from the state Capitol. Charleston Mayor Joseph Riley, former president of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, and Columbia Mayor Bob Coble said the site — [www.scunited.org](http://www.scunited.org) — will be used to attract funds and encourage flag opponents to contact state legislators. Gov. Jim Hodges wants the flag moved, public opinion polls lean toward removal and 46,000 people marched in Columbia last week to protest its presence atop the Capitol dome. But with the Legislature refusing to act, Riley said further efforts are needed: "This will allow people from around the country and around the world to be engaged."

— Richard Wolf

**TERROR LINK:** A federal judge in Seattle delayed the start of the trial of suspected Algerian terrorist Ahmed Ressam, accused of conspiring to smuggle explosives into the United States, to allow defense lawyers time to support a change-of-venue request. Ressam had been scheduled for trial next month, but a new date has been set for July 10. Lead defense lawyer Tom Hillier said the Seattle area had been compromised because of recent news reports linking Ressam to the 1996 Olympic bombing in Atlanta.

# Justice fights to return Cu

## Father says he was offered pay to let Elian stay

By Kevin Johnson  
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — The Justice Department sought to block a lawsuit aimed at keeping a young Cuban refugee in the USA, as government lawyers offered evidence of an enduring bond between the boy and his father.

In a mass of documents filed in a Florida federal court Thursday, the government asserted that Elian Gonzalez should resume his life in Cuba with his father, Juan Gonzalez, who has described the 6-year-old as "my life."

The documents also include the father's claim that he rejected offers of \$2 million, a house and a car from Miami relatives and \$4 million from an unidentified church in exchange for an agreement to keep the boy in the USA.

"I don't think there is any truth to that," Miami family attorney Spencer Fig said. "It just doesn't ring true to me."

The legal action represented only one front in an international custody battle involving the boy who survived a shipwreck that killed his mother and 10 other people eight weeks ago off the Florida coast.

The next hearing in the case is set for the week of March 6.

In related developments:

► On Capitol Hill, the boy's Cuban grandmothers told reporters Thursday that they encountered a very nervous youngster in their brief meeting with him Wednesday in Miami. They said the boy's stay with relatives in the USA had completely changed him and pleaded for his expedited return to Cuba.

"We have to save this boy as soon as possible and bring him back to his family," paternal grandmother Mariela



**Playtime in Miami:** Elian Gonzalez bats a ball around in his great-uncle Lazaro Gonzalez's yard Thursday. The U.S. government is advocating Elian's return to Cuba.

Quintana said while meeting with lawmakers in Washington.

► In Miami, the woman who helped the Immigration and Naturalization Service arrange the grandmothers' visit, Sister Jeanne O'Laughlin, said she now believes the child should stay with his Miami relatives.

"I do not think that child will be able to live without fear if he goes back," said O'Laughlin, a Dominican nun who hosted the visit at her Miami Beach home. "I'm going to take the side of what I feel the child right now needs, and that is freedom."

"His mother intended him to live here, and I think that should be the case at least for the present," she said.

O'Laughlin is expected to meet at 1

p.m. today with Attorney General Reno, a close friend. Reno has said for the boy's return to Cuba.

► In Havana, the national campaign urging the boy's return was expected to intensify with a big demonstration planned for today. More than 100 Cubans are expected to jam streets in Havana and several other Cuban cities.

The campaign waged by the Cuban government and its people is not contrary to the ultimate result sought by the U.S. Justice Department.

In documents filed Thursday in federal court, authorities relied heavily on what they believe is a legitimate relationship between father and son. According to transcripts of INS interviews with the father, authorities said



**Anderson:** Urges a Colorado House committee to close "a leak in the gun law" that allowed her to help the Columbine gunmen obtain weapons.

## Killers' friend: Law let me buy guns for them

# Crash prompts safe

## Official defends American Airlines' operations at hearing

By Alan Levin  
USA TODAY

LITTLE ROCK — American Airlines' top safety officer said Thursday that the company is instituting 85 new safety recommendations because of a crash here last year that killed 11 people, but he declined to second-guess the pilots' decision to land in a severe storm.

The spotlight in the investigation of the June 1 crash turned to American's corporate culture and whether training, management practices and the desire for profits might have contributed to the accident and a string of others at the airline and its subsidiary since 1995.

In 1995, 160 people were killed when an American Airlines jet crashed into a mountain near Cali, Colombia. In 1994, 83 died when an American Eagle propeller plane crashed in Indiana and North Carolina.

In each case, concerns about pilot training and the airline's procedures were raised in investigations by the National Transportation Safety Board.

Robert Baker, vice chairman of AMR Corp., American's parent company, defended the airline's corporate culture in testimony. He said the company can prides itself on gathering amounts of data, which it then uses to prevent problems. "We are very on ourselves," Baker said.

Since American Flight 1420 crashed off the runway and crashed into steel stanchions, the airline moved to reorganize its safety department, boost cooperation with pilots and revise numerous policies, Baker said. However, Baker conceded his company needs to do a better job of incorporating all the data it has in its training.

Under sometimes pointed questioning by the NTSB, Baker had "no opinion" on the crash of Flight 1420's pilots, who apparently did not properly perform pre-flight procedures and touched down in crosswinds that exceeded 40 mph.