Teen Cigar Use Surprisingly Prevalent

CDC Study Shows 25 Percent of High Schoolers Smoked One in Past Year

By David Brown
Washington Post Staff Writer

Slightly more than one-quarter of American high school students have smoked all or part of a cigar in the last year, and about 2.6 percent report having smoked at least 50.

That is the main finding of the first rigorous study of cigar use among U.S. teenagers, which was released yesterday by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Whether it represents a change in high schoolers' behavior from previous eras is unknown.

The survey found that 37 percent of teenage boys had smoked a cigar in the previous year, compared with 16 percent of girls.

Cigarette smokers and smokeless tobacco users were three times more likely to have tried a cigar as their peers who didn't use those other tobacco products. White male teenagers were the biggest users of cigars, with 42 percent reporting having tried at least one.

Researchers associated with the study expressed surprise at the results and suggested it may signal an ominous trend.

"We were expecting a report in the single digits," said Michael P. Eriksen, director of the CDC's Office on Smoking and Health. "But given the magnitude of it—more than 25 percent—we can't help thinking that it's reflecting some recent uptake in cigar smoking."

Nancy Kaufman, an epidemiologist at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation who conducted the survey, said she believes teenage cigar use is the product of advertising campaigns whose purpose is to make glamorous and sexy a product previously associated with middle-age and elderly men.

"There is an interesting phenomenon in which cigars are being used as props for other high-fashion products, such as designer sunglasses and designer jeans. What we see is a whole retooling of a consumer product to a new market," she said.

Norman Sharp, president of the Cigar Association of America, said the manufacturers and importers his organization represents "don't condone teenagers smoking cigars. Our products are made for adults, and if there is a problem we want to cooperate in resolving it."

Cigar sales in the United States have risen over the last three years and now number about 3 billion a year. That total, however, is about one-third of the number of cigars sold in 1964, the year the surgeon general of the United States announced the dangers of smoking.

The hazards of cigars are less well understood than the hazards of cigarettes. However, data recently compiled by the National Cancer Institute suggest that men who smoke one to two cigars a day for about 20 years have about six times the risk of developing larynx cancer as do nonsmokers. For cancer of the pharynx the risk is about four-fold, and for cancer of the esophagus, about two-fold.

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Kaufman and her colleagues asked about 16,500 students, age 14 to 19, at 202 high schools around the country about their smoking habits. One of the questions was: "How many cigars, if any, have you smoked in the past year?" The questionnaire did not distinguish between an experimental puff or two of a cigar and more intensive consumption. About 27 percent of the teenagers answered yes.

Among boys, 42 percent of whites, 25 percent of blacks and 32 percent of Hispanics answered yes. Among girls, 16 percent of whites, 13 percent of blacks and 20 percent of Hispanics answered yes. Both sexes combined, 2.3 percent of whites, 3.6 percent of blacks and 2.5 percent of Hispanics said they had smoked at least 50 cigars in the previous year.

Among both sexes and all ethnic groups, 14 percent of teenagers who had not smoked a cigarette in the previous month reported they had smoked a cigar in the previous year. Fifty-four percent of people who had smoked a cigarette in the last month said they had tried a cigar.

Kaufman said epidemiologists now need to study the "pattern" of cigar use—how much is smoked and in what social situations teenagers try or consume cigars. She is particularly interested in knowing how widespread is the practice of hollowing out short cigars and replacing the tobacco filler with marijuana. Smoke from the resulting "blunts" is then inhaled. That practice delivers more toxic products to the body than when the smoke is only swirled in the mouth, which is the usual practice in cigar smoking.

The national study, published in the CDC's Mortality and Morbidity Weekly Report, was accompanied by two regional surveys of cigar use by teenagers.

The Massachusetts state health department found that 39 percent of high schoolers reported having smoked a cigar at some time; 28 percent in the previous year; and 15 percent in the previous month. The Roswell Park Cancer Institute surveyed ninth-graders in two New York counties and found that about 14 percent had smoked a cigar in the previous month. Among those who had bought cigars, about 75 percent said they "rarely" or "never" were asked their age.

The Food and Drug Administration is currently phasing in sweeping regulations of tobacco products. Those regulations, which largely address issues of advertising and access to minors, do not cover cigars.

The final rule issued last year includes a passage stating that "FDA has focused its investigation of its authority over tobacco products on cigarettes and smokeless tobacco products, and not on pipe tobacco or cigars, because young people predominantly use cigarettes and smokeless tobacco products."

Staff writer John Schwartz contributed to this report.

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IN BRIEF

Government Pays Farmers to Idle 16 Million Acres

In the latest addition to the nation's largest conservation program, the government said yesterday it will pay farmers nearly $40 an acre not to grow crops on 16.1 million acres of land.

Agriculture Secretary Dan Glickman said the total, an area about the size of West Virginia, includes 4.4 million acres that are particularly environmentally sensitive. "We set out to enroll land that would yield the highest environmental benefits, keep productive cropland growing food and fiber and be fair to taxpayers in providing the most environmental bang for the buck," Glickman told reporters.

The land will be enrolled in the Conservation Reserve Program (CRP). Farmers will be paid an average of $39.40 per acre to idle the land, about $10 less per acre than in the last CRP. The cost to taxpayers is more than $636.2 million. But Glickman said that is $1.6 billion less than the program would have cost over 10 years at the higher rate.

Contracts on about 21.2 million acres will expire by Sept. 30, and the Department of Agriculture is accepting 11.7 million acres of that land into the new CRP.

—Associated Press

Canadian Cat Ruled Not Endangered

■ The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service refused to declare the Canada lynx an endangered species yesterday but acknowledged the elusive cat has suffered significant population loss and that only a few hundred survive in the lower 48 states.

The unusual move, confirming the animal's dire situation while refusing to protect it under the Endangered Species Act, drew quick criticism from environmentalists.

The Canada lynx, about the size of a bobcat, is the only lynx left in North America and its population "has decreased significantly in the lower 48 states," said Ralph Morgenweck, director of Fish and Wildlife Service's Denver regional office. "Unfortunately, our resources are limited," he said.

In March, a federal judge in Seattle ordered the agency to reconsider an earlier decision to keep the cat off the list amid mounting evidence it is headed for extinction.

Adding the cat to the endangered species list could lead to new restrictions on logging and other commercial development in the four states where it still lives outside Alaska and Canada—Washington, Montana, Wyoming and Maine.

"We're glad the Fish and Wildlife Service is finally acknowledging the magnitude of threats to the lynx," said Joan Moody, a spokeswoman for Defenders of Wildlife in Washington, D.C. But the failure to put the cat on the protected list "is another indication of their lack of nerve in acting on controversial species," she said.

—Associated Press

Peña Proposes Energy Saving Plan

■ Energy Secretary Federico Peña has proposed a way for the government to reduce millions of dollars in wasted electricity each year. Peña will require federal contracts to specify that companies install energy-saving technology and equipment in federal buildings at no up-front cost to the government. Then, over a number of years, the companies would receive half the savings realized from reduced energy costs.

"We've found a win-win-win solution to cut those costs, reduce pollution and encourage the market for energy-saving technology," Peña said in a statement Wednesday. When fully implemented, he said, the plan is expected to save more than $1 billion a year.

Department figures show the government spends about $4 billion a year on electricity.

—Associated Press

THE FEDERAL DIARY

Women Surviving the Cuts

By Mike Causey
Washington Post Staff Writer

An updated statistical snapshot of the Clinton administration's highly successful federal downsizing efforts shows that the Defense Department took the most hits—accounting for about 64 percent of the 300,000 federal jobs eliminated in the last several years.

Federally Employed Women Inc., which obtained the report from the Office of Personnel Management, says it seems to support the government contention that women were not hurt by downsizing. Normally a cutback of that magnitude would have thrown thousands of women and minorities—who lack seniority or the protection of veterans preference—out on the street.

As it turned out, many of the jobs eliminated—by giving employees buyouts and early retirement—were held by men in middle management. Had there been a regular reduction in force, their seniority and veterans status would have protected most of them. Under the last-hired-first-fired reduction-in-force procedures, women and minorities—who made up a large percentage of federal hires in the last several years—would have been first to go.

Some women have complained that most buyouts go to men. That's true, but there's a reason for it. The White House told agencies to target management and supervisory jobs—mostly held by men—to make agencies more efficient, and also to protect "diversity gains" of the last several years. To do that, and to avoid a wide-ranging reduction in force, agencies resorted to what turned out to be the nation's biggest buyout program.

According to the OPM data, the percentage of women and minorities has increased despite a decrease in federal employment. In fiscal 1984, women made up 38.8 percent of all nonpostal federal jobs, and minorities held 26.1 percent of the federal positions. By 1995, despite several years of downsizing, women held 42.9 percent of the government's nonpostal jobs. Minorities held 28.5 percent.

Most of the buyouts (maximum $25,000 payments) went to retirement-age white men in the Defense Department.

Defense paid buyouts to 92,432 civilian employees while all other agencies paid 36,035 through the end of fiscal 1996.

During the same time period, a total of 30,976 employees were fired, almost 22,000 of whom came from the Defense Department. Non-Defense agencies fired 9,137, according to the report. On Sunday, this column reported that only 22,656 workers had been fired. That number was based on older OPM data.

Between 1993 and 1996, Defense eliminated 21.3 percent of its civilian work force. The Agency for International Development cut 31.9 percent of its jobs; the General Services Administration was down 30.2 percent; the U.S. Information Agency dropped 20.9 percent; and NASA cut 23.3 percent. The Department of Housing and Urban Development lost 19.6 percent, while Agriculture was down 13.6 percent. Energy cut 16.5 percent of its jobs.

The Departments of State and Interior eliminated more than 10 percent of their work forces, as did the Smithsonian Institution. Transportation cut 7.8 percent. The biggest percentage cut, however, came from OPM itself, which eliminated 47.6 percent of its jobs during the three-year period.

Since the Clinton administration took office, the number of executive branch jobs in the Washington area has dropped from 316,096 to 274,252. That reduction—of more than 41,000 civilian federal jobs here—is also higher than reflected in earlier government reports.

Investment-Retirement Prep

At 9 a.m. tomorrow on WUST radio (1120 AM), financial planner **Paul Yurachek** will talk about what federal workers should—and shouldn't—do during the thrift savings plan open season that runs through July 31. At 10 a.m., lawyer **Tom O'Rourke** and benefits specialist **Bob Leins** will talk about retirement benefit laws.

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