VAPE SENSORS IN SCHOOLS

Vaping continues to be a problem among middle school and high school students. According to a report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, in 2020, approximately 1 in 5 high school students and 1 in 20 middle school students reported current e-cigarette use. Standard smoke detectors are unable to detect e-cigarette vapor, making it difficult for school district staff to know when this activity is going on in their buildings.

How do you know if vaping is occurring at your school? In the restrooms? In the faculty/staff breakrooms? What is your policy related to vaping?

"Old school" cigarettes generate smoke that is easily identified by standard smoke detectors. These detectors do not work on vapor from e-cigarettes. New technology now exists to detect not only e-cigarette vapor, but also specific chemicals in the vapor, such as THC.

Do your homework before purchasing any of this new sensor technology – many options are available and there are pros and cons to each. Determine whether you want the sensors hardwired into your technology system and server, which requires permanent placement, has a significant up-front time to install and may be expensive. Wireless sensor systems that operate via a Wi-Fi connection are also available. Because they are battery-powered, wireless sensors can be placed virtually anywhere and easily moved if a better location is identified, but they will need regular battery replacement.

Also, consider sensors that may have multiple purposes. Many companies are now offering sensor technology that will also detect sound anomalies, such as gunshots, loud yelling and even keywords that can be programmed to determine if bullying is taking place in that location. Pairing the sensors with existing video camera locations will help identify individuals present when sensors alert.

Proactively educating students and staff on the detrimental health effects of e-cigarette use, paired with installing these new sensors, should be an integral part of the process. Additionally, work with the school district's solicitor to develop language that addresses the school district policies for students and staff related to the use of e-cigarettes. This information should be included in the Student Code of Conduct and school district staff policy documents and communicated to everyone.

New sensor technology, paired with appropriate education the health risks of vaping and a clear policy shared with all members of your school community, may provide another layer of wellness, safety and security to your facility.

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