

Another squabble for CFD.

The state's Department of Health wants to keep smokeless tobacco and alcohol out of minors' hands and has raised concerns about the advertisements kids are exposed to.

By Michelle Dynes

From the Cheyenne, WY, Wyoming Tribune-Eagle.

CHEYENNE -- The Wyoming Department of Health has raised concerns over the companies that sponsor Cheyenne Frontier Days. While the World's Largest Outdoor Rodeo is a family event, youngsters are exposed to tobacco and alcohol advertising during the celebration. A letter, dated Jan. 15 and signed by the health department and officials representing seven other health-related groups, asked members of the CFD committee to consider a review of current policies and youth access to these substances. The department also offered to pay for an assessment. But CFD's executive director rejected the offer.

The Department of Health's letter acknowledged the CFD committee's proactive steps, such as adding TIPS training, requiring identification to enter the U.S. Smokeless Tobacco Company's tent and relocating the teen entertainment tent away from the adult dance hall, but also suggested there could be room for improvement. "I think kids who want to use will find a way," said Dr. Brent Sherard, director of the Department of Health and the state health officer. He added that creating a healthier environment for children and reducing substance abuse should be the goal for any health department. And while CFD officials declined a formal evaluation, he feels that the department made some progress.

"I appreciate them even looking at (the proposal)," Sherard said. "I'm pleased that the discussion is open." He added that the conversation also raised awareness about the potential for youth access at Frontier Park. CFD Executive Director Dave Johansen said Friday that organizers do their best to obey all city, county, state and federal laws as they apply to tobacco and alcohol. He added that he is not aware of any problems that have not been addressed.

"Our smokeless tobacco sponsor is regulated, at the federal level, as to what they can and cannot do at a venue such as Cheyenne Frontier Days, and our malt beverage program continues to follow all city and state regulations regarding the sale and dispensing of malt beverage," he wrote in a Feb. 28 response to the health department.

"Our close working relationship with the city of Cheyenne and Laramie County authorities, as well as constant monitoring by the State of Wyoming Revenue and Taxation and the Division of Liquor, assures that CFD has every opportunity to do what is both legal and responsible." But while a product such as smokeless tobacco may be legal, it also is harmful said Loretta Wolf, Wyoming director of the American Cancer Society and one of the advocates who signed the health department's January letter. Other organizations that had representatives sign the letter were Laramie County Tobacco Prevention, Wyoming Comprehensive Cancer Control Consortium, Wyoming Through With Chew Program, Smokefree Wyoming, American Heart Association and Laramie County Community Partnership.

The American Cancer Society would like to decrease use, as well as youth initiation. "If you keep them from starting young, hopefully they will never pick up the product," she added. Wolfe said she also would like the city of Cheyenne to follow the example set by officials in Greeley, Colo. The city banned the distribution of tobacco samples in December. In response, U.S. Smokeless Tobacco Co. withdrew a \$200,000 sponsorship from the Greeley Stampede rodeo. But a similar situation offers an opportunity to seek sponsors with a more positive message.

"Others are stepping up," she said. "Baseball has survived without it. NASCAR has survived without it. Rodeo can survive without it."