

Legislative panel backs bill raising smoking age to 21

Pharmacy sales of tobacco would also be prohibited

By Katie Lannan

STATE HOUSE NEWS SERVICE

The Massachusetts smoking age would rise to 21 and pharmacies would be banned from selling cigarettes and other tobacco products under a bill recommended Thursday by the Joint Committee on Public Health.

The bill, intended to curb tobacco use among youth and nicotine addiction, also includes electronic cigarettes and "other similar products that rely on vaporization or aerosolization" in the definition of tobacco

products that cannot be used in public places or sold to minors.

State Representative Kate Hogan of Stow, the House chairwoman of the Public Health Committee, called the bill's provisions "forward-thinking" and said that nine out of every 10 smokers begin using tobacco products before age 19.

"With this legislation, the Commonwealth has a real opportunity to intervene during the early formative years to prevent young people from using tobacco products and becoming addicted to nicotine, a habit that can last through their entire lives," Hogan said.

The bill was referred Thursday to the Senate Committee on Ways and Means. From there,

backers hope to see it come before the full Senate "as soon as possible," said state Senator Jason Lewis, who cochairs the Public Health Committee.

The legislation, which includes components of eight tobacco bills filed this session, builds on actions already taken at the local level across many Massachusetts communities.

In 2005, Needham became the first town in the country to ban the sale of tobacco products to people under 21. Since then, 85 other Massachusetts municipalities have followed suit, Hogan said. At least four have raised the age to 19. Elsewhere in the state, the smoking age is 18.

Although there has not been vocal opposition to anti-tobacco

legislative measures, the initiatives have also not figured prominently into the prominent priorities of legislative leaders and Governor Charlie Baker.

The bill's advancement from committee was praised at a press conference. Its margin of support within committee was not available; a committee aide declined to say how committee members voted on the bill or provide the total vote tally.

If Massachusetts were to raise its age for sale of tobacco products to 21, it would join Hawaii as the only other state to do so. Other states, including California, are considering taking the step as well, according to the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids. In Alaska, Alabama,

Utah, and New Jersey, the age for tobacco sales is 19.

In 2014, the Rhode Island-based pharmacy chain CVS announced it would stop selling tobacco products across all of its locations. At least 128 Massachusetts communities have banned tobacco sales in their local pharmacies.

Dr. Lynda Young, a Worcester pediatrician who chairs the antismoking coalition Tobacco Free Mass, said the bill would provide uniformity and eliminate a confusing "patchwork" of different laws and regulations across the state.

"Enactment of the bill will be a giant step forward for public health, as it will have an immediate, positive impact on the well-being of our young peo-

ple," Young said in a statement. "We urge its quick passage by the Legislature."

The Legislature over the years has raised taxes on tobacco products — a \$1-per-pack increase was approved in 2008 and again in 2013, for instance — and state government receives regular, substantial revenues from a 1998 litigation settlement with tobacco companies, although antismoking advocates say too little of the settlement revenue has been dedicated to public health and antismoking efforts.

If passed, the bill would take effect as soon as it is signed by the governor, though the higher smoking age would not apply to people who turn 18 by Sept. 1 of this year.



KEITH BEDFORD/GLOBE STAFF

TAKING A STAND — Governor Charlie Baker spoke during an event at the State House in Boston on Thursday commemorating the ninth annual Jane Doe Inc. White Ribbon Day, which encouraged men to take leadership roles in preventing violence against women.

Lobster season may start earlier

Institute warns of warm ocean

By Patrick Whittle

ASSOCIATED PRESS

ROCKPORT, Maine — Maine's lobster catches will likely peak early this year, which could mean an abundance of cheap lobster for consumers and bad news for the state's signature industry, a group of scientists reported on Thursday.

Maine's busy summer lobster fishing season typically picks up around early July, the same time the state's tourism industry gets in gear. But scientists with the Portland-based Gulf of Maine Research Institute predict this year's lobster season will get rolling two or three weeks early.

The scientists, who unveiled their findings during the Maine Fishermen's Forum in Rockport, pinned the early lobster season on warming ocean temperatures. Along Maine's coast, temperatures are 2 to 3 degrees Fahrenheit higher than normal. That means lobsters are likely to move inshore and become more easily trapped earlier this summer, they said.

An early lobster season can disrupt Maine's valuable lobster supply chain, which is partially dependent on big July and August catches, and can lower prices. In 2012, a year of early catches, prices at the dock fell 16 percent and prices to consumers fell, too.

The 2014 haul shattered state value records because of a high-volume catch that arrived on schedule.

"If the timing is off by just a few weeks, it can have a major impact throughout the supply chain," said Andrew Pershing, the chief scientific officer with the research institute.

Maine is by far the most productive lobster fishing state in the country, accounting for more than 80 percent of the haul in 2014, and the industry has been riding a wave of heavy hauls and high values in recent years. Annual lobster catches in the nation grew from 71.7 million pounds in 2003 to about 148 million pounds in 2014. The total value of the catch about doubled in that time.

Scientists with Gulf of Maine Research Institute were quick to point out that early lobster catches do not necessarily guarantee a drop in price. One of the big factors influencing price is the volume of catch, and there is no way of predicting that, said Katherine Mills, a research scientist with the institute.

Mills added that in recent years the industry has worked to open up markets for lobster that are not tied to summer tourism, such as increased exports to China. Also, the industry will be able to prepare in advance, she said.

"From harvesters to dealers and transporters all the way up to processors and marketers, people have been wondering what to do if this happens again," Mills said. "This will give them two to three months of lead time."

After two months of TLC, swan released into the wild

Bird had injured leg on fishing line in Brockton

By Mina Corpuz

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

A swan whose leg was injured by fishing line was released Thursday into a pond in Brockton, animal rescuers said.

The 2-year-old adult bird, known as a mute swan, was rescued about two months ago from D.W. Field Park in Brockton, said Katrina Bergman, executive director of the New England Wildlife Center in Weymouth.

Several residents called the Animal Rescue League of Bos-



The 2-year-old mute swan was weighed for the last time before being released into the Brockton pond.

ton about the swan, which seemed to have difficulty walking, Bergman said. The swan

had a "nasty gash" on its left leg, which was treated by veterinary specialists at the wildlife

'He was wonderfully obnoxious when he was in the hospital. He's independent.'

KATRINA BERGMAN
Executive director of the New England Wildlife Center

center.

The swan developed an infection that required multiple surgeries, she said, and he lost some weight. But not his spirit, Bergman said.

"He was wonderfully obnox-

ious when he was in the hospital," Bergman said. "He's independent."

Bergman said she appreciates residents' compassion to care for the swan.

"It's terrific that people were concerned about the swan enough to call," she said. "It's a great message that we send to our children that we care about animals, because it translates into caring for people."

On Thursday, the swan was released in the same spot where he was found. Unfortunately, he has not been able to find his mate.

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Fatal accident investigated at Mansfield train station

Man, 47, struck while trying to cross tracks

By John R. Ellement

GLOBE STAFF

The investigation into the death of a man struck Wednesday by an Amtrak train at the MBTA's Mansfield commuter rail station is continuing.

Transit Police Superintendent Richard Sullivan said the 47-year-old man's death was an accident and that he was struck by an Amtrak train near the station around 3 p.m. Wednesday. He said the man's name was being withheld pending notification of next of kin.

Service from the Mansfield station, which had been closed since the accident, was scheduled to resume at 4 p.m. Thursday, MBTA spokesman Joe Pesaturo said.

Sullivan said the train was Boston-bound and that the

man was trying to get across the tracks when struck. His death was an accident, Sullivan said.

Amtrak spokesman Mike Tolbert said the man was struck by a Northeast regional train traveling faster than 100 miles per hour.

"No one was authorized to be on the tracks at that time," Tolbert said.

He said Amtrak trains, including Acela, are permitted to travel at maximum speeds through the Mansfield station. Acela can speed through at 150 miles per hour, Tolbert said.

Amtrak trains ran at reduced speeds through the Mansfield station Thursday at the request of Transit Police, he said.

Globe correspondent Mina Corpuz contributed to this report. John R. Ellement can be reached at ellement@globe.com. Follow him on Twitter @JREbosglobe.



LANE TURNER/GLOBE STAFF

TUNNEL VISION — Scaffolding outside an Emerson College dormitory framed pedestrians Thursday at the corner of Tremont and Boylston in downtown Boston.

Driver, 80, succumbs to injuries from crash

By J.D. Capelouto

GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

An 80-year-old woman who was trapped under a school bus for two hours Wednesday following a crash in Westborough has died, police said.

Desiree White of Plymouth was taken to a local hospital with critical injuries late

Wednesday afternoon.

Police and fire officials used the Jaws of Life to remove White from the wreckage, after the minivan she was driving collided with a school bus on West Main Street and slid under it at about 4:30 p.m.

Two other passengers in the van and the bus driver were al-

so taken to the UMass Memorial Medical Center in Worcester, police said.

No students were aboard the bus.

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