

March 18, 2019

KICK BUTTS DAY EMPOWERS ESCAMBIA COUNTY YOUTH TO EXPOSE THE E-CIGARETTE INDUSTRY

Students Working Against Tobacco Declares Florida Youth Are “Not A Lab Rat!”



Contact:

Media Desk
(850) 595-6500 ext. 6000

Pensacola, Fla. – Students Working Against Tobacco (SWAT) in Escambia County is standing up to the electronic cigarette industry for the 24th annual Kick Butts Day on Wednesday, March 20, 2019. This national day of activism, sponsored by the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, encourages youth to raise awareness of the problem of tobacco use in their community and urge elected officials to take action to protect kids from tobacco.

SWAT’s theme this year is “Not A Lab Rat!” empowering Florida youth to declare they are not part of a ‘social experiment’ for the addiction and harms of e-cigarettes. While e-cigarette companies continue to deny marketing their addictive products to young people, the fact is that one in four Florida youth (ages 11-17) tried e-cigarettes in 2018,¹ and nearly one in four Florida high school students reported current use in 2018 – an astounding 58 percent increase compared to 2017.²

In Escambia County, Florida, youth e-cigarette usage rates have reached 25.6%. This Kick Butts Day, SWAT youth will implement a social media campaign, entitled “Don’t Be A Lab Rat,” to educate peers on e-cigarette usage and encourage them not to allow big tobacco to experiment on them. Additionally, Escambia County SWAT youth will educate the community through the “Keep Pensacola Beautiful-Clean Your Block” initiative, during which SWAT youth adopt a neighborhood and organize a clean-up event to remove cigarette butts from the selected area.

“The e-cigarette industry is targeting our generation with their addictive products,” said Kendyl Knight, a member of Escambia County SWAT. “We don’t know what the long-term effects are, and we don’t think it’s right for us to be the ‘lab rats’ for their ongoing experiment.”

Florida’s youth are fighting Big Tobacco by exposing the e-cigarette industry’s efforts to addict their generation. As a response to the skyrocketing use of e-cigarettes among youth, the student-led organization launched its “Not A Lab Rat” campaign in October 2018. Throughout the year SWAT chapters will work to dispel myths and educate their peers on the truth about e-cigarettes, commemorating on the second annual statewide “Not A Lab Rat Day” on October 23, 2019.

The fact is that e-cigarettes are not harmless. Many contain nicotine,³ among other harmful chemicals,⁴ ultrafine particles and cancer-causing toxins.⁵ Nicotine is highly addictive and can harm adolescent brain development, which continues into the early to mid-20s.⁶

SWAT aims to empower, educate and equip Florida youth to revolt against Big Tobacco. SWAT is a movement of youth working together to de-glamorize tobacco use. Their efforts aim to

shape tobacco free norms, make tobacco less desirable, less acceptable and less accessible. For more information or to get involved, visit swatflorida.com.

About Students Working Against Tobacco (SWAT)

SWAT is Florida's statewide youth organization working to mobilize, educate and equip Florida youth to revolt against and de-glamorize Big Tobacco and the e-cigarette industry. SWAT is a united movement of empowered youth working towards a tobacco free future.

To learn more about Students Working Against Tobacco, visit www.swatflorida.com or follow us on Instagram at [@swatflorida](https://www.instagram.com/swatflorida).

About Tobacco Free Florida

The department's Tobacco Free Florida campaign is a statewide cessation and prevention campaign funded by Florida's tobacco settlement fund. Since the program began in 2007, more than 212,000 Floridians have successfully quit using one of Tobacco Free Florida's free tools and services. There are now approximately 451,000 fewer adult smokers in Florida than there was 10 years ago, and the state has saved \$17.7 billion in health care costs.⁷ To learn more about Tobacco Free Florida's Quit Your Way services, visit www.tobaccofreeflorida.com or follow the campaign on Facebook at www.facebook.com/TobaccoFreeFlorida or on Twitter at www.twitter.com/tobaccofreefla.

###

¹ Florida Youth Tobacco Survey (FYTS), Florida Department of Health, Bureau of Epidemiology, 2018.

² Florida Youth Tobacco Survey (FYTS), Florida Department of Health, Bureau of Epidemiology, 2018.

³ US Department of Health and Human Services. [E-cigarette use among youth and young adults: a report of the Surgeon General \[PDF-8.47 MB\]](#). Atlanta, GA: US Department of Health and Human Services, CDC; 2016.

⁴ US Department of Health and Human Services. [E-cigarette use among youth and young adults: a report of the Surgeon General \[PDF-8.47 MB\]](#). Atlanta, GA: US Department of Health and Human Services, CDC; 2016.

⁵ Cheng T Chemical evaluation of electronic cigarettes Tobacco Control 2014;23:ii11-ii17.

⁶ US Department of Health and Human Services. [E-cigarette use among youth and young adults: a report of the Surgeon General \[PDF-8.47 MB\]](#). Atlanta, GA: US Department of Health and Human Services, CDC; 2016.

⁷ Mann, Nathan M, Nonnemaker, James M., Thompson, Jesse. "Smoking-Attributable Health Care Costs in Florida and Potential Health Care Cost Savings Associated with Reductions in Adult Smoking Prevalence." 2016.