

Stop the Fires!
**Enacting a Nationwide Standard to Protect Consumers from
Accidental Fires Caused by Cigarettes**
U.S. Rep. Edward Markey
Harvard School of Public Health Symposium
January 24, 2005
(report released but symposium postponed due to weather)

I want to thank the Harvard School of Public Health, the Legacy Foundation, the State of New York, the National Institute of Standards and Technology, and especially Dr. Greg Connolly, for the work you have done to demonstrate that while there is no such thing as a “safe cigarette,” there really is such a thing as a SAFER cigarette..

All of you deserve tremendous credit for dispelling the smoke screen of myths and misinformation that has surrounded self-extinguishing cigarettes.

Anytime you go up against the tobacco industry and the tobacco industry’s money you really need fierce and dedicated advocates on your side. While today we are focused on eliminating the number one cause of fatal fire, I want to take this opportunity to personally thank both Matt Myers and Dr. Cheryl Heaton for taking on the larger battle of reducing the number of smokers in our country and for revealing the truth about the tobacco industry.

Approximately every 8 seconds someone dies from a tobacco related cause. That means that if I talk for ten minutes today, 75 people will die from a tobacco related cause before I finish. Cheryl and Matt are the leaders in the fight to stop this horrible epidemic.

Over a quarter of a century ago, my dear friend, former Congressman Joe Moakley first introduced a bill to regulate the fire hazard of cigarettes. Since that time the tobacco industry has been very effective in blocking this legislation. I believe that they will eventually realize that it is in their best interest to produce self-extinguishing cigarettes, but while they are stalling, people are dying.

Imagine if this bill had become law when Joe Moakley introduced it in 1979. We could have prevented over 20,000 deaths and perhaps Deirdre and Liam’s family would still be with us today. We can no longer tolerate losing one more innocent child or putting one more firefighter at risk in a fire that could have been prevented.

Deirdre and Liam, I promise you and all of the other families who have lost loved ones in these tragic fires that I will continue this fight until we make the New York standard the national standard and stop these senseless deaths and injuries. I will begin this year’s fight for a national standard this week when I reintroduce the Cigarette Fire Safety Act with my Republican colleague, Congressman Peter King.

I believe that the time for a national cigarette fire safety standard is approaching. Passage of the New York standard has significantly changed the landscape of this issue and this report proves that the tobacco industry has no legitimate excuse for refusing to sell these safer cigarettes nationwide. As New York and this important new study demonstrates, tobacco companies can, in fact, produce cigarettes that have fire safety benefits without affecting sales.

This study will be an indispensable tool to combat discredited industry arguments against the establishment of a national standard.

Confronted with the evidence, people are beginning to realize that the tobacco industry is really just protecting company profits at the expense of consumer lives. Just as consumers would not allow the automobile industry to sell cars with air bags and seat belts in New York and cars without those protections everywhere else, consumers will not allow tobacco companies to sell safer cigarettes in New York and more dangerous cigarettes everywhere else. Once the public realizes that the tobacco industry sacrifices over 800 people every year in order to save a couple of pennies per pack of cigarettes, they will demand a national standard.

Although the current makeup of the Congress will make passage of this legislation challenging, there is no reason that this should not be a bipartisan issue. Last year, 33 Republicans were willing to take on tobacco industry and support legislation to give the FDA the authority to regulate tobacco products. This year we are going to target those members and educate them about this commonsense consumer safety issue.

I am hopeful that in the absence of federal legislation, states will press forward and add to the call for national legislation by passing bills like Representative Rachel Kaprelian's that require the adoption of the New York standard.

I believe that we will soon reach a point when the tobacco industry begins to clamor for a national standard. We know that tobacco companies' lawyers are harden veterans who are proud of their legal victories even though those victories ensure the continuation of havoc and death caused by cigarettes.

They are not easily deterred from their mission to sell cigarettes and generate large profits but it is going to be very difficult for them to sustain their current dual standard of safety. The tobacco lawyers must realize that if companies sell a safer product in New York and a more dangerous product elsewhere, the legal jeopardy looms. I believe that the recognition of this liability will ultimately lead the tobacco industry to reconsider their position on our bill. Once this happens the challenge will be to ensure that nothing is done to weaken the New York standard. We must insist that the strong New York standard becomes the national standard.

But our success depends on the help of the grassroots organizations. We have been fortunate in the past for the support of both the health and the first responder communities. I look forward once again to the support of Tobacco Free Kids, the Fire

Fighters, the Fire Chiefs, the Volunteer Fire Fighters, the State Fire Marshals, the PIRGs, and the many other health and consumer groups who have endorsed our bill in the past.

This year we have another opportunity to make this bill a reality but we will need your help putting the spotlight on this issue. Congress is a stimulus-response institution and it responds when it gets thousands of phone calls from constituents.

New Yorkers and Canadians should not be the only ones who are protected from these little torches. Everyone in the United States deserves the same protection from fires caused by cigarettes. If the tobacco industry can make self-extinguishing cigarettes for New York, then they should be required to make them for Massachusetts, Montana and everywhere in between.

Together we can save thousands of lives and prevent these senseless fires. I look forward to work with you to make this happen.

Thank you.