

Dear Mammoth Lakes Town Council members,

Mammoth Lakes has taken important steps to protect our environment, from eliminating the sale of small single-use plastic water bottles to addressing Styrofoam foodware. These efforts reflect a strong commitment to honoring the “Leave No Trace” values cherished by Mono County residents and visitors alike.

Building on the momentum of Earth Day, our community has an opportunity to address another growing environmental and public health concern: single-use tobacco and vape products.

The American Lung Association is committed to ending the death and disease caused by tobacco use. It supports policies that reduce tobacco use, protect youth, and prevent harmful environmental exposure. Single-use tobacco products contribute to these problems and increase the burden on communities to manage their harmful impacts.

Cigarette filters, the most commonly littered item found in clean-ups,<sup>1</sup> contain plastic that does not biodegrade. They also release harmful chemicals such as nicotine, arsenic, and heavy metals into soil and waterways, putting wildlife and ecosystems at risk.<sup>2,3</sup>

Disposable e-cigarettes, or vapes, raise further concerns. These products often contain lithium batteries and nicotine residues that qualify as hazardous waste. The discarded nicotine e-liquid is legally classified as an acute hazardous waste under federal and California law because even small amounts of exposure can cause death or permanent injury/illness.<sup>4,5</sup> These products cannot be disposed of through regular trash systems,<sup>6</sup> so they place added strain on local waste management and pose risks to public safety.

Communities across California are responding to these concerns by adopting tobacco retail licensing ordinances. These policies can include provisions prohibiting the sale of single-use tobacco products, paired with revenue-neutral enforcement mechanisms.

Addressing these products would not only reduce environmental harm but also help limit youth access. In 2023, 23% of 11th graders reported having tried vaping. More than one-third of 7th graders and the majority of 9th and 11th graders say these products are easy to obtain, which raises serious concerns about addiction and long-term health among our youth.

Mammoth Lakes has already demonstrated its commitment to protecting the environment. Adopting a tobacco retail licensing ordinance that prohibits the sale of single-use tobacco and vape products would be a natural next step to support public health and safeguard future generations.

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<sup>1</sup> Truth Initiative, Why Are Cigarette Butts the Most Littered Item on Earth? (Aug. 20, 2018), <https://truthinitiative.org/research-resources/harmful-effects-tobacco/why-are-cigarette-butts-most-littered-item-earth>.

<sup>2</sup> Dannielle S. Green et al., Cigarette Butts Have Adverse Effects on Initial Growth of Perennial Ryegrass (gramineae: Lolium perenne L.) and White Clover (leguminosae: Trifolium repens L.), 182 *Ecotoxicology & Env't Safety* 109418 (2019).

<sup>3</sup> Hiroshi Moriwaki et al., Waste on the Roadside, “Poi-sute” Waste: Its Distribution and Elution Potential of Pollutants into Environment, 29 *Waste Mgmt.* 1192 (2009).

<sup>4</sup> Discarded commercial chemical products, off-specification species, container residues, and spill residues thereof, 40 CFR § 261.33 (2025). [Accessed April 30, 2025]. <https://www.ecfr.gov/current/title-40/section-261.33>.

<sup>5</sup> Cal Code Regs 22 § 66261.33 (Barclays 2025).

<sup>6</sup> Dep't Toxic Substances Control, Managing Hazardous Waste, State Cal. (Sept. 2016), <https://dtsc.ca.gov/discarded-battery-management-fact-sheet>.

<sup>7</sup> Mammoth Unified School District. California Healthy Kids Survey, 2023-2024: Main Report. San Francisco: WestEd for the California Department of Education.