



OPINION

Let's end disposable vape waste



BY **LUCAS ROCKETT GUTTERMAN** and **TONY HACKETT** POSTED 04.24.2025

OPINION – Electronic waste is the fastest growing part of our waste stream, and there is one cause that California can put a stop to: single-use, “disposable” vapes.

Americans now throw away 5.7 disposable vapes (or e-cigarettes) per second—nearly 500,000 each day, according to the [CDC Foundation \(https://tobaccomonitoring.org/reports/trends-report-2024/\)](https://tobaccomonitoring.org/reports/trends-report-2024/). This number has increased from 4.5 per second just one year earlier as reported by CALPIRG Education Fund’s [Vape Waste \(https://pirg.org/california/edfund/resources/vape-waste-the-environmental-harms-of-disposable-vapes/\)](https://pirg.org/california/edfund/resources/vape-waste-the-environmental-harms-of-disposable-vapes/) report. This relentless stream of electronic waste isn’t just alarming—it’s extremely hazardous and yet entirely preventable.

California [Assembly Bill 762](https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billStatusClient.xhtml?bill_id=202520260AB762) (https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billStatusClient.xhtml?bill_id=202520260AB762) offers a commonsense solution by prohibiting the sale of battery-embedded vapes that can't be refilled or recharged.

Disposable vapes combine the worst aspects of electronic waste and single-use plastics. Each contains a lithium-ion battery—the same rechargeable technology used in electric vehicles and smartphones—and yet is designed to be discarded after a single use.

It makes no sense to throw out a rechargeable battery that could last hundreds of charges after just one use. The lithium in disposable vapes sold each year in the U.S. [weighs 29.5 tons](https://pirg.org/california/edfund/resources/vape-waste-the-environmental-harms-of-disposable-vapes/) (<https://pirg.org/california/edfund/resources/vape-waste-the-environmental-harms-of-disposable-vapes/>)—enough to make batteries for 3,300 electric cars. We need these finite materials for our clean energy future, not landfills.

If you placed all the vapes Americans throw away each year end-to-end, [they would stretch over 7,000 miles](https://pirg.org/california/edfund/resources/vape-waste-the-environmental-harms-of-disposable-vapes/) (<https://pirg.org/california/edfund/resources/vape-waste-the-environmental-harms-of-disposable-vapes/>)—twice across the United States. Their plastic cases will stay in our environment for hundreds of years.

We have no good way to recycle these devices. They mix hazardous nicotine or cannabis liquid, batteries, and different plastics that aren't recyclable. Most end up in landfills where they leak toxic metals like mercury [into groundwater, or as litter in our parks, beaches, and streets](https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/13/23/12994). (<https://www.mdpi.com/2071-1050/13/23/12994>).

Surprisingly, most disposable vapes sold today aren't approved by the FDA. Only [34 vapes have been approved](https://digitalmedia.hhs.gov/tobacco/hosted/E-Cigarettes-Authorized-FDA-JAN2025.pdf) (<https://digitalmedia.hhs.gov/tobacco/hosted/E-Cigarettes-Authorized-FDA-JAN2025.pdf>)—and none are fruit-flavored—yet disposable vapes are still ubiquitous. In fact the FDA has delivered more than [800 warning letters](https://www.fda.gov/tobacco-products/ctp-newsroom/fda-warns-nine-online-firms-illegally-selling-flavored-disposable-e-cigarettes) (<https://www.fda.gov/tobacco-products/ctp-newsroom/fda-warns-nine-online-firms-illegally-selling-flavored-disposable-e-cigarettes>) to retailers for selling unauthorized tobacco products including disposable vapes. AB 762 makes things clearer for stores: no disposable vapes, period.

This bill has real teeth for enforcement. It gives the California Attorney General and local officials power to fine violators: \$500 for first offenses, \$1,000 for second offenses, and \$2,000 after that for each single-use vape sold. Most importantly, it lets authorities take away tobacco licenses from stores that break the law. This creates a strong reason to follow the rules.

The evidence shows that bans work when backed by strong enforcement. California's December 2022 restriction on flavored vapes reduced disposable e-cigarette sales by more than half in one year, according to the [CDC Foundation](https://tobaccomonitoring.org/wp-). (<https://tobaccomonitoring.org/wp->

content/uploads/2024/11/2024MonitoringE-CigaretteTrendsUS-1.pdf). Good laws with proper enforcement, especially when combined with readily-available legal alternatives, reduce harmful product sales without creating black markets.

AB 762 finishes the job started by the flavor restriction with a clear solution. By banning disposable vapes, we prevent them from littering our beaches and parks and stop vape waste. The bill ensures the law will work while still allowing adults to use refillable cartridge vaping devices if they choose.

We shouldn't tolerate disposable vapes joining the 500 pounds of electronic waste we dispose of each second (<https://pirg.org/articles/6-surprising-facts-from-the-uns-2024-electronic-waste-report/>) in the U.S. The California legislature should pass AB 762.

Lucas Rockett Gutterman is Designed to Last Campaign Director for CALPIRG. Tony Hackett is a policy associate with Californians Against Waste.

Want to see more stories like this? Sign up for **The Roundup**, the free daily newsletter about California politics from the editors of Capitol Weekly. Stay up to date on the news you *need* to know.

Sign up below, then look for a confirmation email in your inbox.

SIGN UP »

Leave a Reply

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *

Comment *

Name *

Email *

Website