



VTA: Promising the Vapor Industry a Fresh Perspective

The newly formed Vapor Technology Association pledges to advocate for emerging vapor technologies.

By Jennifer Gelfand

Like many in the vapor industry, Tony Abboud, national legislative director of the newly formed Vapor Technology Association (VTA), is alarmed by what he sees. “We have a concerted effort among groups that are hostile to vapor products—for reasons that are somewhat unbeknownst to us—to categorize this product like any other tobacco product when it is, in fact, quite different,” he says. “One of the reasons we felt it necessary to start VTA is to counteract that message.”

That sentiment echoes a frustration that many in the vapor industry are feeling as they brace for regulation that could well mean the demise of the majority of vapor products currently on the market—and of manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers whose businesses depend on them. As everyone following the issue knows,

On Board With VTA

Vapor Technology Association's board has the experience to guide the industry through the adoption of standards, says Tony Abboud, who relays that the board is comprised of industry veterans, public policy advocates and legal experts.



SANJIV DESAI
VMR Products



ARNAUD DUMAS DE RAULY
FIVAPE



BRITTANI CUSHMAN
Intrepid Brands



GEORGE CASSELS-SMITH
Tobacco Technology



PATRICIA KOVACEVIC
Nicopure Labs



RON TULLY
Next Generation Labs

FDA has proposed regulation that would require a pre-market review of any e-cigarette or vaping product unless the manufacturer can show the product to be “substantially equivalent” to one that was on the market prior to the February 2007 predicate date. Given the nature of the vapor industry—one launched by a revolutionary idea that has since evolved through continuous innovation—this would essentially

relegate every product in it to undergo a costly pre-market evaluation.

As Gregory Conley, president of the advocacy group American Vaping Association (AVA), puts it, “Essentially the FDA regulation is a guaranteed death knell for over 99 percent of the companies in the industry.”

THE DEEMING DILEMMA

Enter VTA. “Our top priority

is addressing the one-size-fits-all deeming regulations,” says Abboud. “The attempt to overlay a somewhat anachronistic regulatory scheme that applies to tobacco products onto a technology product that has virtually none of the same characteristics as traditional tobacco products is an incorrect approach. The pre-market tobacco application is such an expensive endeavor that you will see an enormous



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contraction in this cottage industry, and all of the innovation that has been going on will be washed away.”

To combat that effort, VTA intends to work to educate mainstream media and legislators about vapor technology, helping to get both consumers and policymakers the facts that they need to understand the products and the issue. A first priority is to dispel information that is sending a confusing message to consumers, notes Abboud. “There doesn’t seem to be a coordinated positive direction as far as the media is concerned,” he explains. “More and more

people are believing that vapor products are as dangerous as traditional [tobacco] products, which is a disconcerting trend,” he says, noting that it takes an enormous amount of time to educate the media. “If we don’t do something about that, the policy won’t matter. All of the people trying to scare folks away from the product segment will succeed and people will continue smoking. At the end of the day, unless we balance the discourse and get people the actual information that is truthful, then there really is no hope.”

While Abboud acknowledges that

there are already several industry associations working to represent the needs of the nascent vapor community, he says that VTA will distinguish itself by bringing a more inclusive, disciplined approach to representation. “No one has been taking a comprehensive, coordinated approach to the issue; that is the big differentiator we have—the fundamental distinction between us and the other associations out there,” he says. “Our membership will include the entire distribution chain—importers, manufacturers, distributors, suppliers and retailers, both online and brick-



and-mortar. We feel it is imperative to defend the industry from top to bottom. You cannot represent only one sector and be effective.”

SUPPORT FOR ALL SIZES

As part of its effort to welcome all vapor companies into the fold, VTA has chosen a tiered fee structure. “Rather than one arbitrarily set fee, we base our membership dues on company size so that people at all levels of the industry can join,” says Abboud. “In exchange for that, they will have access to a sophisticated lobbying team that can help put members in touch with Congress in a thoughtful and comprehensive way. The battles being raised in [Washington] D.C. are only a piece of the overall puzzle, so we will also partner with associations to address threats at the state level.”

The association has already attracted 70 new members since its launch in late January of 2016, including Tennessee Smoke Free Association (TSFA), a leading advocacy group with a focus on tobacco harm reduction through the use of personal vaporizers. “VTA and its leadership bring a much-needed, fresh perspective to the industry and a responsible approach to the public policies that impact it,” says Dimitris Agrafiotis, TSFA’s executive director. “The Tennessee Smoke Free Association is committed to promoting greater public health through vapor products, and we will work hand-in-hand with VTA to fight proposed federal regulations that only serve to eliminate this antismoking alternative.”

In addition to working with its members to push back on misleading

information, VTA plans to pursue strong industry standards and responsible regulations that will, by ensuring the safety of consumers, calm fears and correct misperceptions. “Product safety is incredibly important,” says Abboud. “The industry has an obligation to put standards in place that will make sure these products operate properly. The deeming regulations as proposed don’t do anything to address concerns about batteries heating up and so on. And the mainstream media and public health groups are ebullient when negative news comes out because it’s an opportunity to denigrate the product, which, in turn, influences decision makers. That’s why the market has to do more to put standards in place.” **TBI**

NOTE: For more on Vapor Technology Association, see “A Vapor Voice” on p. 72.