

December kNOw Smoking News Column

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### **Leave cookies, milk and a lighter for Santa?**

“A stump of a pipe he held tight in his teeth, and the smoke it encircled his head like a wreath.” I suspect that in today’s society, the tobacco smoke bellowing from Santa’s pipe would not be as welcomed as it was in 1822 when Clement Moore’s poem “T’was the Night Before Christmas” was made famous. Even the great Albert Einstein once remarked that pipe smoking “contributed to a somewhat calm and objective judgment in all human affairs.” Whether the observation is true or not, pipe smoking has had many other famous devotees, among them Franklin D. Roosevelt, Mark Twain, and the fictional Sherlock Holmes, who often disappeared into a haze of pipe smoke while solving his cases.

Leisurely rituals are associated with pipe smoking: choosing from a variety of pipes and tobacco, cleaning and loading the briar, puffing and tampering, then sitting in a fragrant swirl of smoke and contemplating life, or for Santa, making that list and checking it twice. Like any other adolescent misbehavior, I can’t help but wonder if smoking would be listed as naughty or nice. (Do you think those busy elves thought that Santa could be more productive in toy making if he didn’t spend time puffing and tampering with his pipe?)

Pipe smokers don’t receive the same type of written health warnings given to cigarette smokers and users of smokeless tobacco. The lack of warnings on pipe tobacco is particularly troubling because pipe smoke contains the same toxic mix of substances found in cigarette and cigar smoke: roughly 4,000 compounds, over 40 of which are known to cause cancer in humans and animals. The risk depends on how much tobacco is inhaled. “Pipe tobacco should be enjoyed like a fine wine. You sip it as a connoisseur” states the managing editor of a Raleigh based magazine, Pipes and Tobacco. I’m sure like many spouses of pipe smokers, Mrs. Claus would often say to Santa, “Your red suit and white beard smell like an ashtray.”

The American Cancer Society insists that all pipe smokers inhale to some degree. And not inhaling deeply does not provide protection against cancer. Pipe smokers are particularly prone to oral cancers, most commonly of the lips, tongue, roof and floor of the mouth, pharynx, larynx, and esophagus. According to the National Cancer Institute, if not for tobacco use, oral cancer, the sixth most common cancer in the world, would be virtually nonexistent as a cause of death.

Unfortunately, the risks of pipe smoking aren’t confined to the smokers. People, elves, or even reindeer exposed to secondhand pipe smoke should also be concerned, as pipe smoke is no less

toxic than cigarette smoke. Since pipe tobacco burns at a lower temperature than cigarette tobacco, pipe smoke contains a higher concentration of cancer causing chemicals such as nitrosamine. Smoke from pipes can also cause respiratory infections, headaches, and burning eyes. Poor Rudolph! A red glowing nose, burning eyes, and a headache!

Pipe smoking is often thought of as a way to relax, to feel good, to relieve stress. Or in Santa's case, pipe smoking enhanced his objectivity and probably facilitated contemplation of his naughty and nice list. So whether you allow Santa to smoke a pipe in your home, or you catch him gesturing a secret wink saying, "Let's keep this between the two of us," I hope you all have a wonderful holiday season celebrating the birth of Christ with family and friends.