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High-tech smoke detectors work

High school seeks to stop surreptitious smoking

BY DEBORAH KOHL KREMER



The song says, "Everybody knows that smoking ain't allowed in school." That's certainly the case at [Dixie Heights High School](#).

Anyone trying to sneak a smoke in the boys' room - or girls' room - at Dixie is greeted by a woman's voice who informs the offender: *"You are smoking in a non-authorized area. The proper authorities have been notified. Please extinguish your flame and exit the restroom."*

All 10 restrooms at Dixie have been equipped with very sensitive cigarette detectors made in England. These are not like smoke detectors for home use. According to [Harry Wessel](#), Dixie's plant manager, the detector is made up of two parts - one picks up the smoke, the other the flame.

After the verbal warning, the detector discharges a noise and flashing light that alerts nearby faculty of the offense, and they converge on the restroom.

Smoking on the grounds results in a trip to detention, and repeat offenders are suspended.

"One light from a lighter or two puffs from a cigarette will set this thing off," Wessel said. "The students are thanking me for installing them. It is just awesome."

After about three weeks, [Dixie Principal Kim Banta](#) says not one cigarette butt has been found in a restroom. Because of this success, other high schools in the area are looking into the system as well.

"The idea came about as a result of the non-smoking students complaining because sometimes the restrooms smelled like smoke," said Banta. "Although we try to have faculty in the restrooms to prevent the smoking, we just can't be everywhere at all times. With this system we are covered."

[Kenton County School District Superintendent Tim Hanner](#) said the exciting part, besides working to eliminate smoking within a school, is that the students are leaders within the high schools.

"This shows they not only have a voice, but when they generate ideas, they are listened to, and many times acted upon, by school staff," Hanner said. "I am proud that we have school administrators who work with and listen to our students, because we have a lot to learn from them."

Banta believes the overwhelming majority of Dixie students are non-smokers. "I can only think of about five students in the whole school who struggle to get through the day without a cigarette," she said. "So they may not be happy with the system, but they are not allowed to smoke on school grounds anyway."

Many students are glad they don't have to deal with the smell of cigarettes in their school. [Senior Merrill Sams](#) says that it was never a huge problem, but occasionally students could smell smoke in the restrooms.

"I think kids who smoke are really getting the picture now," she said. "They will get caught with this system, and no one wants to get in trouble."

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