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**SAM VENABLE: YOU CAN RYO NOW, THEN RIP LATER**

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By Sam Venable

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Let the record show that the lungs of your obedient servant, once tarred by 2 packs of cigarettes daily, haven't been assaulted by The Evil Weed since 1979.

Let the record further show that the owner of these lungs has no desire whatsoever to resume such a smelly, insane, unhealthy and expensive habit until the ice covering hell is at least 7 feet thick.

However —

If I did ever take complete leave of my senses and fell off the wagon, I believe I'd smoke those roll-your-own cigarettes that are all the rage — in tobacco shops and government offices — right now.

You don't have to visit a tobacconist to understand the impact of the roll-your-own (RYO) movement. Many area grocery stores, service stations and delis are devoting shelf space to paper tubes and sacks of shredded tobacco.

Yes, of course. Cigarette papers have been available for decades. But you know and I know and everybody from the FBI to the Podunk County sheriff knows 99 percent of these products have been used for marijuana, not tobacco.

No more.

Not only are individual papers, simple rolling machines and bagged 'bakker becoming big business, dozens of RYO "filling stations" — where customers can use the store's fancy equipment to crank out a carton or more — have opened across the land.

According to a recent story in the Nashville Tennessean, approximately 1,500 of these stations have sprung up nationwide, 30 of them in Tennessee, in the last three years.

By crafting their own, either one at a time or 20-25 per minute, smokers have a wider variety of tobacco blends to choose from. Plus, they save a bundle — at least half the cost of store-bought "ready rolls."

Therein lie\$ a mo\$t expen\$ive rub.

Pending before the U.S. Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals is a battle between rolling machine manufacturers and the Treasury Department. The Feds want these high-volume rollers to pay taxes and keep records comparable with major cigarette manufacturers. Stay tuned.

In the meantime, Janes and Joes patient enough to churn out single smokes have a variety of small, inexpensive machines at their disposal. I checked a shop near the News Sentinel a few days ago and was amazed at how these things had made such a comeback.

When I worked for the U.S. Forest Service over four decades ago, nearly everybody in the woods, including His Stupidness, carried one of these "mousetrap" gizmos in his jeans pocket. You sprinkled tobacco on one side, licked the gummed edge of a paper, laid it down and snapped the cover shut.

Presto! Out popped a fresh one.

Quite a novelty for such a dangerous undertaking.

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