

A lawyer who sued 4 major US tobacco firms and is taking Juul to court says the e-cigarette giant is 'irredeemably evil'

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Schlesinger accused Juul of deliberately setting out to get teenagers hooked on its products. Sarah Johnson/Flickr

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- **Scott Schlesinger has successfully sued US tobacco firms RJ Reynolds, Lorillard, and Liggett. Last month, his firm also won a \$157 million case against Philip Morris, partially for its role in running Juul.**
- **Speaking to Business Insider about Juul and the e-cigarette industry, Florida-based Schlesinger accused Juul of deliberately setting out to "get millions of teenagers hooked" on its products.**

- **A Juul spokeswoman told BI that the firm was focused on winning trust by working with lawyers and regulators, and that it was combating underage use of its products. The spokeswoman also denied that Juul intentionally tries to attract underage users.**
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The US lawyer who successfully sued four major US tobacco firms has described the e-cigarette firm Juul as "irredeemably evil" and called for it to be shut down.

Juul is the buzzy e-cigarette company valued at an estimated \$16.4 billion in the space of four years. It has become popular thanks to the sleek design of its vaping products and its flavored pods. But it's also the poster child of a sudden rise in vaping among teens and underage users. It has also been criticized because its packaging **did not always make clear** that many of its products, such as its signature 'pens,' contained tobacco.

Scott Schlesinger, whose eponymous law firm is based in Fort Lauderdale, has successfully sued US tobacco firms RJ Reynolds, Lorillard, and Liggett. Last month, Schlesinger's firm also won a \$157 million case against Philip Morris, partially for its role in running Juul (its parent firm Altria obtained a 35% stake in Juul for \$12.8 billion in 2018).

And now he's going after Juul.

Schlesinger has filed several ongoing cases against the firm, including one on behalf of the parents of a Florida college athlete who **faces the loss of a lung after being hospitalized** for five months because of severe illnesses allegedly linked to his Juul vaping.

Speaking to Business Insider about Juul and the e-cigarette industry, Schlesinger said: "Nicotine addiction is a gift that keeps on giving to the tobacco industry. It keeps going. [The] industry only cares about nicotine addiction if [it] can make money addicting kids with e-cigarettes.

"Philip Morris and Altria went and bought into Juul. It was an unholy alliance – a consolidation of nefarious powers. These people should all be put out of business. There's no justifiable basis for any of this."

Juul denied that it deliberately attempts to attract underage users, and said it was working with health officials and regulators to win public trust.

Investigations found Juul is readily available to underage users, amid mysterious vaping deaths

In 2017, the US Food and Drug Administration launched an undercover crackdown of Juul sales to minors, which it called the "[largest coordinated enforcement effort](#)" in agency history, eventually meting out over 1,300 warning letters and fines to retailers for illegally selling Juul and other e-cigarette products to minors.

Juul has also been sued [for allegedly marketing its products to minors](#).

[An ongoing investigation](#) by the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has found that at least 52 Americans have died from vaping-related lung injuries as of December 10, in addition to 2,409 other reported cases of vaping-related lung problems. The CDC doesn't explicitly link the incidents to Juul.

Set against this ongoing furor, Schlesinger accused Juul of disingenuously presenting itself as a tool to help wean adult smokers off traditional, combustible cigarettes. Actually, he claims, it's always just wanted to hook teenagers.



A packet of Juul's signature flavored 'pods,' which it has since stopped selling in the United States. Associated Press

He said: "There's a [narrative] about trying to help adult smokers quit [by using e-cigarettes]. Okay, maybe, but there's a way to do that. It's called the FDA, and it's called approval as a medical device, or a smoking cessation aid, or a medical drug product.

"In other words, the FDA's there to approve any drug you want to put on the market," he continued. "Nicotine's a drug. Do you want to put it on the market through an electronic delivery device? Get approval, and support the public health [ecosystem], and let doctors prescribe it.

"That's nonsense, though – what they wanted was 5 million teenagers to become customers for life. They got them. So [Juul] is a terrible business."

Schlesinger's cases against Juul are part of a rising legal tide surging against the firm. Ned McWilliams, a US attorney with a focus on pharmaceutical litigation, [told Vice](#) that he spoke to 10 families a day about potential vaping cases. Juul told Vice that it was contending a number of cases against it, and described some of the claims as "copy and paste unfounded allegations."

When asked about Schlesinger's comments, a Juul spokeswoman told Business Insider in a statement that the firm "remains] focused on resetting the vapor category in the US and earning the trust of society by working cooperatively with attorneys general, regulators, public health officials, and other stakeholders to combat underage use and convert adult smokers from combustible cigarettes.

The statement continued: "As part of that process, we recently [stopped](#) accepting orders for our Mint JUUL pods in the US; suspended all broadcast, print, and digital product advertising in the U.S.; are investing in scientific research to ensure the quality of our FDA Premarket Tobacco Product Application (PMTA) application, and expanding our commitment to develop new technology to reduce youth use.

"Our customer base is the world's 1 billion adult smokers and we do not intend to attract underage users."

Whatever the outcome of the suits, the sustained negative attention is beginning to have an impact on Juul's fortunes. While the firm forecast [revenues of \\$3.4 billion for 2019](#) – a threefold increase on its 2018 yield – one of its major investors, Altria, [took a \\$4.5 billion writedown](#) on its \$12.8 million investment. Altria cited regulatory factors as one of the reasons for its writedown.