

WHO on e-cigarettes - protecting cigarette sales and causing more disease and death



Original image removed at the request of WHO Legal Counsel

Following publication of [WHO's paper on e-cigs](#) for the [FCTC COP-6 meeting in Moscow](#) the statement below went out to media from Professor Gerry Stimson. I agree with all of it, but think he is far too polite. My initial reaction was as below (**Update 15 Sept 2014**: a [more complete analysis is now available](#)): The new paper is a modest improvement on the [extremist position it took to COP-5 in 2012](#) but it hasn't stopped them recommending a hugely disproportionate regulatory response based on:

- exaggeration of minor or implausible risks;
- selective citation and misrepresentation of science;
- a confusion of objectives and failure to recognise trade offs between them (is it nicotine addiction or disease?);
- poor understanding of and apparent indifference to the benefits to smokers and the experience of users;
- no conceptual framework for harm reduction, relative risk or the role of vaping as a competitor to smoking;

- no consideration of the ethics of obstructing access or otherwise inhibiting routes to safer nicotine use
- failure to acknowledge that the purpose of the [Framework Convention on Tobacco Control](#) is to regulate *tobacco* products

Article 3

Objective

The objective of this Convention and its protocols is to protect present and future generations from the devastating health, social, environmental and economic consequences of tobacco consumption and exposure to tobacco smoke by providing a framework for tobacco control measures to be implemented by the Parties at the national, regional and international levels in order to reduce continually and substantially the prevalence of tobacco use and exposure to tobacco smoke

In other words, it has no mandate to be involved in regulation of non-tobacco products.

Updated 4 September, 2014

A strong package of critical commentary and scientific assessment been issued by UK and European scientists. It is strongly critical of the scientific advice taken by WHO and the negative, and harmful attitude taken by some in public health towards these developments.

1. Press release: [WHO commissioned report on e-cigarettes misleading say experts](#)

2. Article: [A critique of a WHO-commissioned report and associated article on electronic cigarettes](#)

3. Editorial: [Electronic Cigarettes: Fact and Faction](#)

End of update.

_____ Start of Professor Stimson's statement _____

Statement on today's publication of the World Health Organisation (WHO) Report on e-cigarettes

By Professor Gerry Stimson, Emeritus Professor at Imperial College, London and co-director of Knowledge-Action-Change (KAC)*

Tuesday, 26 August, 2014 (London, UK)

By Professor Gerry Stimson, Emeritus Professor at Imperial College London and co-director of Knowledge-Action-Change (KAC)*

WHO's mission is to save lives and prevent disease but once again it is exaggerating the risks of e-cigarettes, while downplaying the huge potential of these non-combustible low risk nicotine products to end the epidemic of tobacco related disease. WHO claims e-cigarettes are a threat to public health, but this statement has no evidence to support it, and ignores the large number of people who are using them to cut down or quit smoking completely

The WHO recommendations will do more harm than good, ironically protect cigarette sales, and do little to decrease the avoidable burden of non-communicable diseases.

What is needed is light touch regulation and a proper appreciation of trade-offs between regulation to protect consumers whilst not destroying the value these products offer to smokers who want to quit smoking.

The WHO position paper appears to have cherry-picked the science, used unnecessary scaremongering and misleading language about the effects of nicotine.

WHO want to regulate these products as either tobacco products or medicines, but in reality they are neither. They do not contain tobacco and they aren't used for treating or preventing disease. They are consumer products, and should be governed by consumer protection legislation with specific standards for liquids devices and packaging, and proportionate controls on marketing. Trying to apply a treaty designed to reduce tobacco consumption is completely inappropriate.

** Professor Stimson is a signatory to the letter addressed to WHO Director General Margaret Chan by 53 leading scientists in May 2014 urging the WHO not to treat e-cigarette regulation in the same manner as traditional tobacco.*
<http://nicotinepolicy.net/documents/letters/MargaretChan.pdf>

The WHO report is available at:

http://apps.who.int/gb/fctc/PDF/cop6/FCTC_COP6_10-en.pdf

[contact info]

About Knowledge-Action-Change

Knowledge-Action-Change is an independent organisation committed to the development and promotion of evidence-based policies and interventions in the field of substance use and related areas of public health and public policy. The organisational ethos is to link knowledge transfer and organisational development to achieve impact at relevant organisational, community, national and international levels.

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