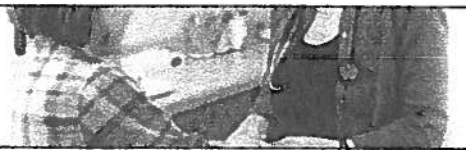


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Leonard Gilroy: E-cigarette regulations likely to do more harm

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By LEONARD GILROY / For the Register

RESEARCH

In the United Kingdom, University of Stirling Professor Gerard Hastings, co-author of a recent Cancer Research UK report on e-cigarettes, said, "E-cigarettes and other alternative nicotine delivery devices are probably much safer than conventional cigarettes, and so if smokers switch to them many lives could be saved."

Regulations in Southern California, and across the nation, to limit the use and sale of electronic cigarettes are spreading rapidly. But like so many well-intentioned policies, these e-cigarette regulations are far more likely to harm public health and anti-smoking efforts than benefit them.

Officials in Los Angeles and Long Beach, along with places like New York City and Chicago, are considering new ordinances to add e-cigarettes to public smoking bans, something officials in Lakewood, Richmond and other California communities have already enacted.

Southern California cities like Seal Beach, Bellflower, Cerritos, Norwalk, Duarte and Alhambra have all enacted moratoria this year preventing new e-cigarette retailers from opening within their borders. The California Legislature considered a bill to add e-cigarettes to the statewide smoking ban earlier this year, a proposal that is likely to return next year.

Rationales for regulatory actions vary, but often revolve around misplaced fears that e-cigarettes will serve as a gateway to the use of conventional cigarettes by kids and non-smokers, as well as misperceptions that e-cigarette vapor is as harmful as cigarettes.

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Both fears are unsupported by evidence. Regarding the “gateway” theory, the Register noted last month that a University of Oklahoma study found that only 43 out of 1,300 college students (3.3 percent) reported that e-cigarettes were the first form of nicotine they'd tried, with only one student later taking up regular cigarette smoking.

And there is growing evidence that e-cigarettes have nearly none of the harmful properties of conventional cigarettes, primarily because nothing is burned in “vaping,” so it doesn't produce the cancer-causing toxins and multitude of chemicals that result from the combustion of tobacco. A study released by Drexel University's School of Public Health this fall found no evidence that e-cigarettes expose users or bystanders to levels of contaminants that would warrant health concerns.

This helps to explain why public health experts are increasingly endorsing e-cigarettes as a solid alternative to smoking and recommending against policies to limit their sale or use. Former U.S. Surgeon General Richard Carmona echoed a similar sentiment in testimony recently submitted to New York's City Council. Carmona urged officials to resist the “well-intentioned but scientifically un-supported effort” to include e-cigarettes in the city's smoking ban, which would “constitute a giant step backward in the effort to defeat tobacco smoking” and “send the unintended message to smokers that electronic cigarettes are as dangerous as [traditional cigarettes], with the result that many will simply continue to smoke their current toxic products.”

Southern California has been a hotbed of regulations aimed at stifling e-cigarette sales and use. It's time to take a different approach. If the goal is to minimize smoking-related illnesses and diseases, then California policymakers should reject counterproductive policies and preserve the ability of smokers to seek safer nicotine delivery alternatives like e-cigarettes that minimize harm to themselves and others.

Leonard Gilroy is the director of government reform at Reason Foundation.

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