

Sanity Should Prevail Over the Regulation of Electronic Vapour Products at COP-9

In early November 2021, the World Health Organization (WHO) will host its 9th iteration of the Framework Convention on Tobacco Control (FCTC) Conference of the Parties (COP). Nearly two decades ago, the WHO developed the FCTC with the goal of providing governments with guidelines for reducing tobacco use. Since then, COP parties have convened every two years to discuss ways in which the FCTC, or its implementation, might be improved.

The 9th COP will deliberate on regulatory approaches for novel tobacco products and Electronic Vapour Products (EVPs). Unfortunately, if the public had hopes for a thorough interrogation of the scientific underpinnings of EVPs and the role it can play in reducing global smoking rates, then they are in for a rude awakening. Regrettably, it has become commonplace at the WHO for public health bureaucrats and government officials to adopt regressive tobacco control policies with no regard for science or less harmful alternatives. Having been in place for decades, the WHO's proposed tobacco control policies have not yielded the desired results, as smoking rates are still high. The other consequence has been the proliferation of illicit tobacco trade. EVPs provide a revolutionary solution to decreasing global smoking rates and instead of promoting these products to smokers wishing to find less harmful alternatives, the WHO has demonised them and is intent on ensuring their demise.

A 2021 Public Health England (PHE) update reiterated that EVPs are 95% less harmful than combustible cigarettes¹. The UK Royal College of Physicians found that EVP's harm profile is way less than cigarettes. Recently, the Cochrane Library found that EVP's are more effective smoking cessation aids than Nicotine Replacement Therapies (NRT's) such as gums and patches. Despite the mounting evidence in favour of EVPs, the WHO has insisted that they are just as harmful as tobacco products and called for their strict regulation to prevent their increasing growth.

It is encouraging that countries such as Canada, France, the United Kingdom and New Zealand have adopted harm reduction as part of their tobacco control policies and recognise that vaping is less harmful than smoking and have regulatory regimes that seek to encourage and educate smokers on the role vaping can play in finding less harmful alternatives to cigarettes. As a result, the abovementioned countries have experienced significant decreases

¹ New Health of England. 2021. "Vaping in England: 2021 evidence update summary". <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/vaping-in-england-evidence-update-february-2021/vaping-in-england-2021-evidence-update-summary>



VAPOUR PRODUCTS
ASSOCIATION

in their smoking rates. Contrary to the narrative advanced by the WHO and anti-vaping lobbyists, youth uptake of vaping is not high and not the pandemic as claimed by the WHO. This does not mean that vaping advocates such as the Vapour Products Association of South Africa (VPASA) are not concerned with youth vaping. For its part, VPASA is actively engaged in efforts to curb youth vaping and reiterating at any given chance, that vaping is for adult smokers wishing to access less harmful alternatives to use nicotine.

It should be noted that though nicotine is addictive, it poses no significant danger to smokers' health. The toxicants generated from burning tobacco are the primary cause of smoking related diseases, and not nicotine. There are around 7,000 chemicals in tobacco smoke, of which nicotine is one. Decoupled from tobacco smoke, nicotine's long-term safety profile has been established through years of pharmaceutical clinical trials and decades of 'over-the-counter' use².

It is hoped that the likes of the UK, Canada, France, and New Zealand will appeal for sanity to prevail and call for scientific based regulation of EVP's and not the WHO's proposals that are mainly based on subjective speculation and no scientific proof. COP9 should further establish a Tobacco Harm Reduction Study Group to conduct a rigorous review of the science behind vaping before any long-term decisions on the appropriate forms of regulation for these products are taken. The Study Group should comprise harm reduction experts from across the scientific community, including those who differ with the views of the WHO on this important subject.

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² Royal College of Physicians. 2016. "Nicotine without smoke - Tobacco harm reduction: A report by the Tobacco Advisory Group of the Royal College of Physicians".
<https://www.rcplondon.ac.uk/sites/default/files/media/Documents/Nicotine%20without%20smoke.pdf>