



The counterfactual

Dec. 7, 2016

To: Media and congressional staff

From: Clive Bates, *The Counterfactual* and Eli Lehrer, president of the R Street Institute

Re: Office of the Surgeon General's forthcoming report on e-cigarettes

On Thursday, Dec. 8, the Office of the Surgeon General of the United States will release its first-ever report on e-cigarettes. We applaud the surgeon general for treating e-cigarettes seriously and trust he will recognize the health opportunities that arise from this much safer alternative to traditional cigarettes.

We do not advise adult nonsmokers or nonsmoking adolescents to use e-cigarettes. However, we believe e-cigarettes—used properly—aid public health by serving as an indispensable tool for smokers interested in quitting deadly, combustible cigarettes. For adolescent smokers or would-be smokers, e-cigarettes function as an avenue of *exit* from smoking. While we cannot simply wish away the tendency of adolescents to engage in risky behavior, the health-care community should welcome opportunities to make it less harmful and enduring.

While there is *no* evidence suggesting e-cigarettes cause material harm to the user or bystanders, we must not blindly assume they are perfectly safe. However, the overwhelming bulk of evidence indicates they are significantly less harmful than traditional, combustible tobacco products. Efforts by health officials to discourage e-cigarette use by suggesting these products are as harmful as combustible cigarettes run contrary to the goals of public health and are an unwarranted interference in the informed choices made by adults.

With this in mind, Clive Bates prepared a list of questions we recommend journalists, Capitol Hill staff and other interested parties pursue before the report's release. The questions and more in-depth material can be found at: <http://www.clivebates.com/?p=4574>

We will work together to refine this list over the next several weeks and welcome comments. You can reach us directly at elehrer@rstreet.org and clivedbates@gmail.com.