Uh-Oh — Smokers Are Drinking the 'Additives Cause the Cancer' Kool-Aid

By Ruth Kava — December 8, 2016

If you asked any American what’s dangerous about cigarette smoking, you’d likely get a response such as "the smoke" or "the nicotine" or "the tar". And if you delved deeper you might get an accurate response like "the chemicals". But what chemicals? A recent report in the journal *Tobacco Control* unfortunately demonstrated that many smokers are confused about exactly which chemicals are causing the damage — and this confusion may actually benefit the purveyors of some cigarettes.

Led by Dr. Noel T. Brewer from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, investigators conducted 2 telephone surveys and an internet survey of over 10,000 people. About 1100 were adolescents, and about 9,000 were adults. They wanted to know what people understood about the constituents of cigarette smoke as it related to health.

They found that 43 percent of adolescents and 61 percent of the adults who participated by phone and a whopping 71 percent of those surveyed on the internet wrongly thought that the dangerous chemicals in cigarette smoke came from the additives added by manufacturers. As anyone who has read ACSH’s multiple articles about cigarette smoking knows, this is certainly not true — such chemicals are inherent in burning tobacco — no additives needed.

And when they inquired whether or not participants had heard of specific chemicals, they found that from 89-95 percent had heard of nicotine, 59-70 percent knew cigarette smoke contained carbon monoxide. Fewer respondents knew that the smoke also contained ammonia (39-53 percent), arsenic (42-66 percent) and formaldehyde (41-68 percent).

Also concerning was the finding that 22 percent of adults responding to the internet survey and 33
percent of those surveyed by phone, as well as 27 percent of adolescents, said they believed that cigarette filters trap all such chemicals.

Such beliefs make people susceptible to advertising about supposedly "natural" cigarettes (which has no accepted definition) — since such products supposedly wouldn't contain additives the idea is that they would be "safer" than other cigarettes. This smacks of the long-discredited idea that "low tar" or "light" cigarettes are less dangerous.

Clearly, as the authors summarized, "Many people were unaware that burning the cigarette is the primary source of toxic constituents in cigarette smoke". Although it may seem that everyone by now should understand the health threats of cigarette smoking, and what is responsible for those threats, that doesn't seem to be the case. Those who still insist on smoking should be direct towards the ACSH publication *Cigarettes: What the Warning Label Doesn't Tell You*, available here [3].

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