

If Seattle Smokers Follow King County's Health Advice, They Will Die



By Alex Berezow — August 28, 2017



Credit: Rattlhed/Wikipedia ^[1]

The King County Health Department, which serves mostly the city of Seattle and its suburbs, has recently earned a reputation for being driven by politics rather than by evidence-based medicine or common sense.

Last month, the county decided that crisis pregnancy centers that don't perform abortions aren't "real healthcare." According to its website, [Care Net](#) ^[2] -- a crisis pregnancy center in the Puget Sound region -- performs pregnancy tests, STD screens, and ultrasounds and provides prenatal education. Because such crisis centers are often faith-based, what they don't do is perform or encourage abortions.

That's anathema to Seattle, a city whose residents and politicians have little use for religion or any person who holds center-left, moderate, or conservative political beliefs. So the King County Board of Health [voted to place warning signs](#) ^[3] outside these crisis pregnancy centers that say (in 10 different languages!) that they are not healthcare facilities. The only debate -- and this is not a joke -- was over the font size.

King County's Health Advice Will Kill Seattle Smokers



The scaremongering doesn't end with faith-based pregnancy centers. This sign about e-cigarettes was posted inside a Seattle light rail car. (See image on right.)

Toxic. Addictive. Not safe. Only one of those three statements is actually true.

E-cigarettes allow users to inhale vaporized nicotine. Nicotine is not really a dangerous chemical. It is, however, addictive, which is why smokers become hooked to cigarettes. Thus, the statement that e-cigarettes are addictive is true.

Are e-cigarettes toxic and unsafe? Toxic and unsafe compared to what? In a large enough dose, anything is toxic and unsafe. Compared to breathing fresh mountain air, yes e-cigarettes are toxic by comparison. But compared to smoking a cigarette, e-cigarettes are lifesavers. Literally.

Without a doubt, [e-cigarettes have helped smokers quit cigarettes](#) [4]. That's a gigantic win for public health. (They might even help fight obesity since nicotine is an appetite suppressant.) The [CDC](#) [5] estimates that nearly half a million Americans die from smoking cigarettes each year. If all smokers quit and adopted e-cigarettes, that number would fall dramatically.

Still, e-cigarettes are not harmless. Because your lungs were not meant to inhale anything other than oxygen, non-smokers shouldn't take up vaping for the fun of it.

A public health department should weigh the pros and cons of any policy objectively before

offering a recommendation. Fearmongering over e-cigarettes is extremely short-sighted and seems driven completely by ideology rather than science or practicality. Indeed, if Seattle's smokers actually follow the advice given by the King County health department, they will be more likely to die.

For fairness and consistency, perhaps King County should place a warning sign on the door of its own health department: "Abandon all data and decency, ye who enter here."

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Links

[1] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Space_Needle002.jpg

[2] <http://carenets.org/medical-services/>

[3] <http://www.seattletimes.com/seattle-news/health/crisis-pregnancy-centers-must-post-disclaimers-stating-not-a-health-care-facility-under-county-rule/>

[4] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2016/12/08/surgeon-general-declares-war-e-cigarettes-not-marijuana-hookah-10559>

[5] https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/data_statistics/fact_sheets/health_effects/tobacco_related_mortality/index.htm