The sky is falling, warns the CDC about largely-imaginary nicotine poisonings

By Gil Ross — April 4, 2014

It's true, more and more poisonings linked to exposure to e-cigarettes and/or the nicotine they contain are being reported to various poison control centers [1]. The CDC just issued another one of their Notes from the field about their concern over e-cigarettes; last autumn it was their data-manipulated expose of the teen epidemic of e-cigarette use and their own feverish interpretation, that millions of our young people were being seduced into a lifelong nicotine and, naturally, cigarette addiction. Objective in-depth evaluation of the data revealed no such thing, but that news was relegated to the circular file in most news organizations.

Over the past few weeks, we have been subjected to repeated tales of nicotine poisoning, which (again detect a theme here?) have proven to be far less than initially apparent [2]. Likewise with this five-alerner, the facts are these: the assembled poisonings seriously harmed no one. The reports, even acknowledged in the CDC's title, deal with calls to poison centers, not actual toxic exposures. Indeed, the majority of e-cigarettes, cigalikes, cannot possibly release any significant amount of nicotine, as it is contained in plastic tubes which require some effort to break open, beyond the skillset of toddlers. The highly-concentrated nicotine solutions which might actually do harm if exposure occurs are restricted to retail and manufacturing sites and are not present in homes, nor are they portable.

Speaking of homes, this site exposes the other household toxins [3] which are of way more actual threat to toddlers and curious, clever children, some of which include:

- windshield washer solutions
- drain cleaners
- toilet bowl cleaners
-
insecticides
- artificial nail removers
- topical anesthetics (i.e. Products that may be used for sunburn pain)
- medicines, medicines, medicines.
- clothing detergents/bleach
- automatic dishwasher detergents
- furniture polish
- perfume & aftershave
- mouthwash
- gasoline, kerosene, and lamp oil
- paint and paint thinner
- mothballs
- alcoholic beverages
- miniatures batteries
- flaking paint
- cigarettes
- rat and mouse poison

Funny though, is it not, I do not remember a single CDC Alert or Notes from the Field about any of these common household toxins. Even toothpaste has been cited for poisoning youngsters much more often than e-cigarettes (notice, however, that cigarettes are a well-known cause of toxic reports and provide a much more likely source of nicotine poisoning than e-cigs). One report asserts that household bleach was responsible for 50,000 reports of toxic exposure in one recent year!

E-liquid poisoning is much more rare than the media wants you to believe. If you take a look at the 2012 report from the National Poison Data System, there were 193,443 reported cases of poisoning from household cleaners. Alcoholic beverages led to 54,445 calls to Poison Control and believe it or not, toothpaste led to 20,206 reported cases of poisoning. When you think about over 20,000 people poisoned by toothpaste, those 365 hospital visits related to e-liquid seem almost insignificant. If the incidence of e-liquid poisoning increased to 15 times higher than 2013, it would still be less common than toothpaste poisoning.

The CDC continues to fulminate about all the hypothetical and exaggerated risks of e-cigarettes to promote their agenda, which is fierce, take-no-prisoners, distort-any-data opposition to reduced harm products, especially e-cigarettes (and snus as well). This is in fact in the worst interests of public health, since their obsession with e-cigs seems to have made them blind to America's real
massive public health problem: cigarette smoking.

This whole, phony scare about nicotine poisoning would be largely alleviated if the FDA would only do its job: regulate e-cigarettes as the consumer products they are, mandate childproof packaging, age restrictions on sales and marketing, reliable manufacturing processes, and accurate labeling then the storm over e-cigarettes would pass. Some say, that may indeed be why the FDA is stalling: they want to keep e-cigs in the limbo status they are in now, indefinitely. Let s hope that is incorrect.