

For Immediate Release



## **US public health expert highlights potential harm from e-cigarettes**

Beirut, Lebanon- 10/05/2011 - The health impact of electronic cigarettes - which are designed to deliver nicotine without the carcinogens associated with tobacco smoke - is still unknown, said a leading US experimental psychologist during an AUB lecture.

Thomas Eissenberg, a professor of psychology at Virginia Commonwealth University and a leading researcher on the effects of nicotine and tar on behavior, told an AUB audience that the substances found in electronic cigarettes are still not being regulated or studied, which means their effects are not understood.

Introduced to the global market in 2004, electronic cigarettes are battery-operated smoking devices that are marketed as a healthy alternative to smoking since they contain nicotine without the dozens of other cancer-causing chemicals found in cigarettes. Most e-cigarettes function by heating up a liquid solution consisting of propylene glycol and nicotine along with flavorings to create a vapor and the effect of smoking.

A 2009 US Food and Drug Administration study showed that the actual nicotine levels did not correspond to those displayed on e-cigarette boxes. Moreover, no health warnings were depicted on the boxes although the level of nicotine levels varied from one e-cigarette to another. In high doses, nicotine could be lethal. More disconcerting was the detection of some cancer-causing agents in certain e-cigarette brands, prompting public health experts to warn users to proceed with caution.

"Until we know more, continued e-cigarette marketing constitutes an uncontrolled experiment whose outcomes are unknown," said Eissenberg.

In the absence of studies, it is not known whether propylene glycol is dangerous when inhaled or whether these smoking devices could attract non-smokers to the habit, potentially turning them into real smokers.

Eissenberg shared his knowledge at a well-attended lecture held on the afternoon of May 5, 2011 in Van Dyck. Entitled "Electronic Cigarettes: Dangerous Drug Delivery Device or Life-saving Treatment?" the lecture was organized by the Center for Research on Population and Health in the Faculty of Health Sciences.

Eissenberg's primary area of research is the behavioral pharmacology of drugs of abuse, focusing almost exclusively on nicotine and tobacco. His current work, funded by the US National Institutes of Health, involves developing laboratory methods to evaluate potential reduced exposure products for tobacco users, and understanding the knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, and effects of waterpipe tobacco smoking. His waterpipe research is conducted in the US, Jordan, Lebanon and Syria.

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**For more information please contact:**

Maha Al-Azar, Media Relations Officer, [ma110@aub.edu.lb](mailto:ma110@aub.edu.lb), 01-353 228

**Note to Editors**

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