E-CIGGIES ARE A PROBLEM AT WORK

E-cigarettes are potentially hazardous and have no place in the workplace, the TUC's head of safety has advised. Hugh Robertson, who said he had received two inquiries from safety reps about the product in the last week, said while the electronic nicotine delivery systems are not banned, they should be subject to the same controls at work as real cigarettes. Noting that US authorities have discouraged their use, he said: 'Certainly e-cigarettes do contain a number of carcinogens and toxins, but these are likely to be at much lower levels than with cigarettes made with tobacco.' He added: 'In answer to the specific question about their legality, e-cigarettes are not covered by the ban on smoking in enclosed workplaces and public places, but an employer does have control over whether their employees can smoke them while at work. Given that the long term effects of the fumes are an unknown, then it could be argued that employers should not be allowing a potentially harmful substance to be used in the workplace under COSHH (the Chemicals regulations).’

He said safety reps ‘should try to ensure that the employer does not allow the use of e-cigarettes in enclosed places or anywhere that smoking tobacco is prohibited, but, as part of a health promotion campaign, might want to work with their employer to encourage smokers to switch to e-cigarettes and use them instead of tobacco cigarettes, but only in places not covered by the smoking ban.’

Last year, NHS Fife and Blackburn College made e-cigarettes subject to the same controls under their smoking policies as normal cigarettes.