

Report of the United States Surgeon-General, January 1989:  
"Reducing the Health Consequences of Smoking. 25 Years of Progress".

- 1 On January 11th 1989 a prepublication copy of the US Surgeon-General's report was released by the US Department of Health and Human Services.
- 2 The stated aim of the Report was to review the changes in scientific knowledge on smoking and health and the results of anti-smoking policies that have been adopted since 1964 when the first Report of the Surgeon-General on Smoking and Health was published.
- 3 The five major claims made in the Report are as follows:
  - 1 The prevalence of smoking among adults decreased from 40 percent in 1965 to 29 percent in 1987. Nearly half of all living adults who ever smoked have quit.
  - 2 Between 1964 and 1985, approximately three-quarters of a million smoking related deaths were avoided or postponed as a result of decisions to quit smoking or not to start. Each of these avoided or postponed deaths represented an average gain in life expectancy of two decades.
  - 3 The prevalence of smoking remains higher among blacks, blue-collar workers, and less educated persons than in the overall population. The decline in smoking has been substantially slower among women than among men.
  - 4 Smoking begins primarily during childhood and adolescence. The age of initiation has fallen over time, particularly among females. Smoking among high school seniors leveled off from 1980 through 1987 after previous years of decline.
  - 5 Smoking is responsible for more than one of every six deaths in the United States. Smoking remains the single most important preventable cause of death in our society.
- 4 The following comments are also made in the preface to the Report:
  - "The ashtray is following the spittoon into oblivion."
  - "The antismoking campaign has been a major public health success. Those who have participated in this campaign can take tremendous pride in the progress that has been made."
  - "As a result of decisions to quit smoking or not to start, an estimated 789,000 smoking-related deaths were avoided or postponed between 1964 and 1985 .... This achievement has few parallels in the history of public health. It was accomplished despite the addictive nature of tobacco and the powerful economic forces promoting its use."
- 5 The following subjects are stated to be future challenges:
  - Children and adolescents
  - Women
  - Minorities
  - Blue - collar workers.

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- 6 The report claims that a specific number of deaths have been avoided as a result of stopping smoking, that each postponed death represents an average gain in life expectancy of two decades, and that smoking is still responsible for more than one of every six deaths in the United States. All of the cited figures are of necessity arbitrary, as it is impossible to establish, for any given individual, that smoking and not some other factor, is the cause of death. After many years of research, it has not been established that smoking is a cause of any disease. Equally, is impossible to determine whether or not, if a smoker who quit had not stopped smoking, he would have died twenty years earlier.

SB/AM  
17th January 1989

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