New report challenges idea that snuff is a 'safer' substitute for cigarettes

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A new study challenges the notion that snuff can be a safer substitute for cigarette smoking. Credit: Courtesy of the American Chemical Society

A 20-year review of scientific research on tobacco and cancer challenges the idea that moist snuff — increasingly popular in the United States — can be a safer substitute for cigarette smoking. The review, by Stephen S. Hecht, is scheduled for the Jan. 1 issue of ACS' *Chemical Research in Toxicology*.

The paper, which covers the broad range of research on cancer induced by tobacco, points out that smokeless tobacco, a known cause of oral cancer, is contaminated with levels of cancer-causing nitrosamines that are generally 1,000 times greater than those found in any other consumer product. Despite health warning labels on packages of smokeless tobacco

and a ban on electronic advertising, sales of snuff have continued to increase, the paper states.

“In the past several years, a new concept has emerged,” the paper notes. “Responsible members of the tobacco control community support the idea of using ‘low nitrosamine’ moist snuff as a substitute for cigarette smoking. The rationale for this is that moist snuff is demonstrably less carcinogenic in humans, and less toxic in other ways, because it lacks the combustion products.”

However, moist snuff products still contain significant levels of carcinogens, and users should stop, perhaps via use of nicotine replacement therapy, rather than switch from one risky product to another, the paper advises.

Source: ACS