



LED "embers" glow with each puff of China's tobacco-free e-pipe, and clouds of pseudo-smoky vapor waft out.

Blowing Smoke Making deals the Chinese way, lesson number one: Don't just shake hands with a potential business partner, pass over a fresh cigarette as well. That's one sign of just how hooked China is. Its 350 million smokers include many who should know better. Sixty percent of male doctors light up, led by former health minister Gao Qiang. Each year smoking kills more than one million Chinese and costs over six billion dollars in health care.

Now one Chinese company says its electronic pipes and battery-powered e-cigarettes can make smoking safer, boasting that there's no tobacco, no tar, no carcinogens. The devices use ultrasound technology to atomize liquid nicotine into inhalable droplets. Critics have raised concerns about the nicotine content. A New Zealand university is recruiting smokers for the first trials, including a look at whether e-smoking might help them quit. At the moment, the World Health Organization representative in China does not recommend using either device. The company is betting that lots of smokers abroad will be eager to sidestep indoor smoking bans with \$200 e-cigarettes. But at that price, Chinese businessmen are unlikely to start handing them out. —*Louisa Lim*

CHINA'S TOBACCO INROADS

33

Percent of the world's smokers

3 million

New smokers each year

540 million

People exposed to hazardous amounts of secondhand smoke

\$39 billion

Tax revenue in 2006 from smoking

20

Average number of cigarettes a man smokes each day