

Legislating Smoke-Free Air in Housing Why Cities Are Increasing Protections

Since 2007, when the City of Belmont voted to require that all attached housing become non-smoking, cities all over California have begun to address this critical issue of seeping secondhand tobacco smoke in housing.

As the scientific body of evidence quantifying the health risks associated with exposure grows, pro-health cities are acting quickly to protect residents. As of March 2010, 11 cities and one county government have adopted provisions designed to reduce secondhand smoke in attached housing and several more are expected to pass new laws before the end of the year.

These new laws provide the housing industry with a new standard for protecting tenants and other residents of attached housing from exposures to this known toxic air contaminant.

About Secondhand Tobacco Smoke

The number of people who are killed by secondhand smoke exposure would more than fill the Oakland Coliseum – every year in the US – that is 53,000 non-smokers, including 6,000 children.ⁱ

One year after passing smoke-free laws, communities in North America and Europe had 17 percent fewer heart attacks compared to communities without smoking restrictions, and the number of heart attacks kept decreasing with time, according to a report in *Circulation: Journal of the American Heart Association* in 2009.

According to the 2006 US Surgeon General's Report on Secondhand Smokeⁱⁱ:

- Secondhand smoke has been proven to cause lung cancer, fatal heart attacks, other cancers and lung diseases.
- Secondhand smoke causes 30 times as many lung cancer deaths as all other regulated air pollutants combined.
- Secondhand smoke causes asthma attacks and other illnesses in children including bronchitis and ear infections.
- There is no safe level of exposure. For example, as little as 30 minutes of exposure can trigger a fatal heart attack in a non-smoker.
- No ventilation system exists that can safely protect a non-smoker.

Californians spend 60% + of their time at home

Thanks to California's Smoke-Free Workplace Act, Californians can breathe easier while at work or in most public places. But the place where Californians spend over 60% of their day -- is not protected at all. A growing number of apartment and condominium dwellers have been asking that local governments do something about the unwanted secondhand smoke from their neighbors smoking.

Eighty-nine (89) % of Alameda County adults do not smoke. (2005 California Tobacco Survey)

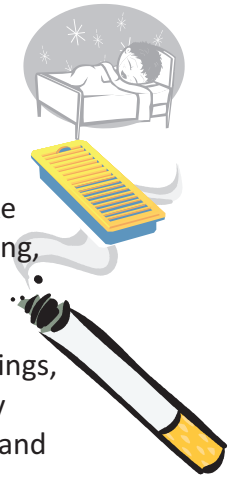
According to the 2007 California Health Interview Survey:

- **92%** of Alameda County residents never allow smoking in their homes
- **68%** of Alameda County **smokers** never allow smoking in their homes

Despite the fact that non-smoking adults are in the majority, nearly half of apartment dwellers report being exposed to secondhand smoke in their homes from drifting smokeⁱⁱⁱ.

Just How Dangerous is Secondhand Smoke in Attached Housing Like Apartments and Condos?

- Secondhand smoke quickly spreads within buildings and cannot be completely eliminated by any ventilation systems, air filters, or other air cleaning devices. Smoke can travel through shared ventilation, air ducts, opened doors and windows, plumbing, and electrical outlets^{iv}.
- The gases in secondhand smoke are absorbed into the walls, ceilings, window coverings, carpets, flooring, and furnishings. In the case of long-time smoked-in units, it is very expensive (\$800 – 3,000) to restore a unit to a pre-smoking status. Simple painting and cleaning does not prevent the residual toxic chemicals from leaching back out of the walls. In many cases, carpeting and window coverings must be completely replaced.
- A study released in 2010, has identified “thirdhand smoke” as the compound formed when nicotine mixes with common household nitrous oxide fumes and forms additional cancer-causing compounds that covers surfaces and may pose the greatest health risk to young children who are touching and ingesting these particles.¹
- As much as 65% of the air in an apartment may be coming from neighbors, depending on the age and ventilation standards of attached dwellings, according to ventilation experts.
- Children, the elderly, and people with asthma and other chronic illnesses are especially vulnerable to being harmed by exposure to secondhand smoke^v.
- Cigarettes are the leading cause of residential fire fatalities, causing 25% of all fire deaths in the US – with seniors over 65 at greatest risk of dying.



ⁱ California Air Resources Board. Quarterly report to the California legislature on the air resources board's fine particulate matter program. 2001. California Environmental Protection Agency.

ⁱⁱ ibid

ⁱⁱⁱ Goodwin-Simon Strategic Research. *Statewide Survey of California Renters 2004*.

^{iv} U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, ibid

^v California Air Resources Board. ibid

¹ Lawrence Berkeley Labs, <http://newscenter.lbl.gov/news-releases/2010/02/08/dangers-of-third-hand-smoke/>