

What are you breathing?

MONROE

Secondhand smoke is the smoke given off by a cigarette, cigar or pipe along with the smoke exhaled by a smoker. There is over-whelming scientific evidence that breathing other people's smoke can cause disease, disability and even death.

Secondhand smoke is more dangerous than previously thought. It is responsible for up to 65,000 deaths each year in the U.S. For every eight smokers who die from tobacco-related disease, one nonsmoker also dies from exposure to secondhand smoke (Center for Disease Control, 2004).

These figures do not include the thousands of youth and adults who experience illness from exposure to tobacco smoke.

Why is secondhand smoke so dangerous? Classified as a Group A carcinogen or cancer causing substance by the Environmental Protection Agency, second-hand smoke contains more than 4,000 chemicals. Many of these chemicals are considered dangerous toxins. It is considered the nation's number one airborne carcinogen with no safe level of exposure (EPA, 1992). Air pollution from secondhand smoke is ten times greater than diesel car exhaust (British Medical Journal, 2004).

When you breathe in secondhand smoke, you are also breathing in tar and nitrosamines (known to cause cancer), carbon monoxide (a poisonous gas that displaces oxygen in the blood), acetone (found in nail polish remover), ammonia (found in floor and toilet bowl cleaners), cadmium (found in car batteries), formaldehyde, benzene (found in lighter fluid), arsenic (found in rat poi-son), naphthalene (found in moth balls), and hydrogen cyanide (a poison), to name a few of the chemicals. When this smoke is breathed in, the heart pumps it to every cell in the body.

Research confirms that exposure to secondhand smoke can cause lung cancer, nasal sinus cancer, chronic heart disease, heart attack, stroke, asthma, bronchitis, pneumonia, eye and nasal irritation, middle ear infections in children, tonsillitis, low birth weight and sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS). Additionally, learning deficits in children, miscarriage, breast cancer in younger women, and other types of cancer have been linked to second-hand smoke. As little as five minutes of exposure to secondhand smoke actually stiffens the aorta, or main artery, of a nonsmoker. The Journal of American Medical Association (JAMA, 2001) reports that secondhand smoke is only about 20 percent less dangerous than actual smoking. Secondhand smoke affects all of us. However, certain groups of people are especially vulnerable to its harmful effects, including pregnant women, infants and young children, school-age youth, anyone with asthma and other respiratory conditions, adults with heart disease and older adults.

To learn more about secondhand smoke and what you can do to protect your-self and your family, visit Smoke Free Union's Web site at www.smokefreeunion.com or call (704) 283- 3539 to request an informational packet.

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