

What is third-hand smoke and is it hazardous?

Second-hand smoke is what affects someone when they are near the fumes from a smoker's cigarette or when a person is exhaling cigarette smoke. Third-hand smoke is considered to be the tobacco toxins that linger in the environment long after a cigarette is extinguished. It can come from many sources where a smoker has lit up; it can even linger on the smoker.

Studies have shown that up to 90 percent of nicotine in cigarette smoke sticks to nearby surfaces, and other cigarette toxins linger in walls, carpets, cars, drapery, clothing, furniture and other materials for hours or days after a cigarette is extinguished.

There are a number of substances in third-hand smoke, some of which are highly carcinogenic. They include:

- Hydrogen cyanide
- Butane
- Toluene
- Arsenic
- Lead
- Carbon monoxide
- Polonium-210, a highly radioactive carcinogen

Researches believe third-hand smoke presents a public health hazard, especially for infants and children. Children may be at greater risk because they breathe faster than adults and inevitably inhale more chemicals. Additionally, babies may take in chemicals through their skin as they crawl around surfaces with toxins on them.

Adults can be exposed to smoke residue in rental cars, hotel rooms or apartments that have a history of a number of years of cigarette smoke.

Direct links to disease from third-hand smoke are not yet known.

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