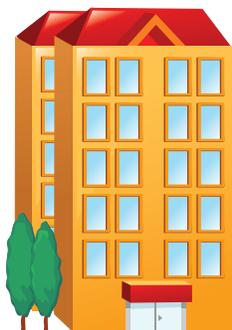


Strategic Brief

Second-Hand Smoke in Multi-Unit Dwellings



There is no known safe level of exposure to second-hand smoke. Albertans are protected from SHS in public places and most workplaces. Alberta Health Services believes that everyone should be protected from SHS. Making your home smoke-free protects everyone living or visiting there, and measurably improves the health of its residents. (This includes single-family homes, or multi-unit dwellings such as an apartment or a condominium).

Did you know...

In 2005, 72% of Albertans lived in homes where they did not allow smoking?⁶

What is second-hand smoke?

Second-hand smoke (SHS) is a toxic mix of more than 7,000 chemicals. In 1992, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency classified SHS as a "Group A" carcinogen – a category reserved for the most dangerous substances proven to cause cancer in humans.¹ Over 69 cancer-causing chemicals have been found in SHS.²

Research shows that the more tobacco smoke you are exposed to, the greater the risk to your health. In addition to causing headaches, nausea, sore throat and irritated eyes, SHS exposure increases the risk of heart disease and cancer in adults.

As well, many people have health conditions such as asthma, angina and high blood pressure. Children are especially vulnerable to illnesses caused by tobacco smoke, including chronic cough, pneumonia, bronchitis, middle ear infections and asthma.

Ventilation or purifiers cannot control second-hand smoke. In 2005 the American Society of Heating, Refrigeration and Air Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) concluded that "at present, the only means of effectively eliminating health risks associated with indoor exposure is to ban smoking activity."³

The bottom line from a sea of authoritative reports is clear and unanimous: all exposure to SHS is harmful and should be eliminated.

Where does the smoke come from?

Research shows that, depending on the age and design of your building, up to 65% of the air in your unit can come from other units in your building.⁴ Second-hand smoke can seep into your unit in a number of the following ways:

- from a neighbour's patio or balcony, or from outdoor common areas through open windows or doors.
- through electrical outlets, cable or phone jacks, or ceiling fixtures
- through cracks and gaps around sinks, countertops, windows, doors, floors, walls and ceilings
- through the ventilation system
- from the off-gassing of objects, especially soft furnishings such as carpets and draperies



For more information
AlbertaQuits.ca

Call toll-free
1-866-710-QUIT (7848)

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The housing sector has been slow in responding to the increasing demand for smoke free buildings. But progress is being made in Winnipeg, for example. Globe General Agencies has made all of their buildings smoke-free!

Landlords have a legal right to make their buildings smoke free and doing so makes good business sense.

- Reduced risk of fire.
 - Lower maintenance and repair costs.
 - Reduced painting frequency and costs.
 - No more complaints about second-hand smoke.
 - Increased marketability
-

Adapted with permission from the Ottawa Council on Smoking and Health

What can I do about second-hand smoke?

Keep track of the dates and times when you are bothered by SHS and, if possible, note where the smoke is entering your unit. Ask your landlord/ condominium board for assistance in resolving the problem.

If the smoke is from someone smoking in common areas, or within five meters (15 feet) of a door, a window that opens or an air intake vent, this is a violation of the Alberta Tobacco Reduction Act. Contact your local bylaw enforcement department or the local RCMP for assistance.

As a minimum, ask your landlord /property manager to install physical barriers such as duct tape, caulking, spray foam or weather stripping where you suspect the smoke is getting in (or do it yourself). Ask the landlord/ property manager to ensure that the ventilation system is working properly.

Seek the support of other residents/owners to have your building/condo go smoke-free and conduct a survey, start a petition or gather testimonials.

If the landlord is not supportive or the situation does not improve, consider taking your case to your local landlord and tenant board. If your problem is considered severe and ongoing, an adjudicator may rule that your exposure to SHS violates your right to "reasonable enjoyment" of chance of success, and you may qualify for legal aid.

If all else fails, consider moving. If your problem has been documented and your landlord is aware of it, you may not incur penalties for breaking your lease.

Where can I get more help?

- Second-hand smoke in multi-unit dwellings is an emerging public issue with no magic bullet solutions. Health regions cannot always advocate on behalf of individuals. Raising awareness and providing information about smoke-free options for people living in apartments, co-ops, social housing and condos can assist tenants/owners to find solutions for themselves in the absence of local or provincial legislation.
- Visit the Non-Smoker's Rights Association online at www.nsr-a-dnf.ca for additional resources, in particular, the detailed guide called, "When Neighbors Smoke."

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Second-Hand Smoke in Multi-Unit Dwellings

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