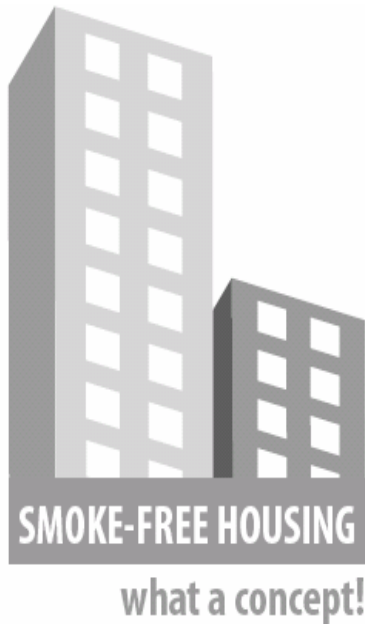


Second-Hand Smoke in Multi-Unit Dwellings



There is no known safe level of exposure to second-hand smoke. Ontarians are protected from SHS at work and in public places. The Ottawa Council on Smoking and Health believes that everyone has a right to the same protection at home—whether they live in a single family home or a multi-unit dwelling, such as an apartment or a condominium.

What is second-hand smoke?

Second-hand smoke (SHS) is a toxic mix of more than 4,000 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 60 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 headache, nausea, sore throat and irritated eyes, SHS increases the risk of heart disease and cancer in adults.

As well, many people have health conditions that are worsened by even brief exposure to SHS, such as asthma, emphysema, 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.

Second-hand smoke cannot be controlled by ventilation or air purifiers. In 2005 the American Society of Heating, Refrigerating & Air-Conditioning Engineers (ASHRAE) concluded that “at present, the only means of effectively eliminating health risk 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 the building.⁴ Second-hand smoke can seep into your unit in a number of ways:⁵

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

Did You Know ...

If given the choice, two-thirds of Ontario residents would prefer to live in a smoke-free building, according to a 2006 survey.⁹ Three-quarters of Canadians do not permit smoking in their homes.¹⁰

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!¹¹

Landlords have a legal right to make their buildings smoke-free and doing so makes good business sense.¹²

- ✓ *Reduced risk of fire*
 - ✓ *Lower maintenance and repair costs*
 - ✓ *Reduced painting frequency and costs*
 - ✓ *No more complaints about second-hand smoke*
 - ✓ *Increased marketability—since 80% of Canadians don't smoke.¹³*
-

References

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- ¹¹ "Smoke-Free Digs," *Winnipeg Sun*, 20 September 2006.
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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 the building's common areas, this is a violation of the *Smoke-Free Ontario Act*. Contact Ottawa Bylaw Services at 3-1-1.

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.⁶

Seek the support of other residents/owners to have your building/condo go smoke-free—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 the 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 your premise.⁷ While not required, the help of a lawyer will increase your 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.⁸

Where can I get more help?

- Second-hand smoke in multi-unit dwellings is an emerging public issue with no magic bullet solutions. The Ottawa Council on Smoking and Health cannot always advocate on behalf of individuals, so we are lobbying decision-makers to provide smoke-free options for people living in apartments, co-ops, social housing, and condos. Your story will help raise awareness and make our case stronger.
- Visit the Non-Smokers' Rights Association online at www.nsfra-adnf.ca for additional resources, in particular, the detailed guide called *When Neighbours Smoke*.