



“The weight of the scientific evidence is now more than sufficient to conclude that the relationship between ETS and heart disease is real. The public health burden caused by ETS more than justifies public policies creating smoke-free workplaces and public areas.”

David Satcher, M.D., Ph.D.
U.S. Surgeon General &
Assistant Secretary
for Health

Secondhand Smoke Something to Think About

In 1999 the National Cancer Institute (NCI) released the most comprehensive report on the health risks of secondhand smoke ever conducted. The report links secondhand smoke, also called environmental tobacco smoke (ETS), to lung cancer, heart disease, sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), nasal sinus cancer, and a host of other diseases in both adults and children.

The 430-page report concludes that in the United States alone, between 35,000 and 62,000 coronary heart disease deaths occur due to ETS exposure each year. “ETS exposures are related to much more than heart disease. When thousands of ETS-related lung cancers and other diseases are considered, ETS clearly is a major cause of death in the United States,” said program coordinator Donald Shopland.

Previous reports by the Surgeon General in 1986 and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) in 1992 concluded that secondhand smoke causes lung cancer, but at that time too few studies were available to assess its relationship to heart disease. The new report compiled by the California EPA included 18 new scientific studies linking secondhand smoke to coronary heart disease.

What is secondhand smoke?

Secondhand smoke is a complex mixture formed during burning from lighted cigarettes, pipes, and cigars. Thousands of chemicals are

found in this mixture, including hydrogen cyanide, carbon monoxide, and dozens of compounds that are known carcinogens, tumor promoters, or tumor initiators. Many of these chemicals have been identified as hazardous and are regulated by various federal or state agencies.

ETS and Children

Perhaps the most troubling findings are those related to increased incidence of disease and death in children due to their exposure to secondhand smoke. The report indicates that secondhand smoke is associated with SIDS (especially in infants of mothers who smoke during pregnancy), middle-ear infections, asthma, bronchitis, and pneumonia. Some scientific studies have determined that postnatal exposure to secondhand smoke may be an independent risk factor for SIDS.

“The report confirms the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s position that secondhand smoke poses major health risks, and we again call on all parents to protect their children from exposure to secondhand cigarette smoke whenever possible. Cigarettes not only pose grave health risks to the smoker, they also threaten the health of anyone who is even near a lighted cigarette, especially children,” said Carol Browner, an Administrator for the U.S. EPA in 1999.

This report is part of a series available from NCI’s Cancer Information Service at 1 (800) 4-CANCER or on the Web at cancer.net.nci.nih.gov

Look Inside...

HealthNews

Find out what the National Cancer Institute says about secondhand smoke.



HealthNews 1

The Toll of Secondhand Smoke

1. Disease	Annual U.S. Deaths or Cases
2. Lung Cancer	3,000 Deaths
3. Heart Disease	35,000 - 62,100 Deaths
4. Sudden Infant Death Syndrome (SIDS) ...	1,900 - 2,700 Deaths
5. Low-Birth-Weight Babies	9,700 - 18,600 Cases
6. Asthma in Children	8,000 - 26,000 New Cases 400,000 - 1 Million Cases of Existing Disease
7. Bronchitis In Children	150,000 - 300,000 Cases 7,500 - 15,000 Hospitalizations 136 - 212 Deaths