

'The debate is over'

Our view:

Surgeon general makes the case that secondhand smoke kills.

For more than 40 years, smokers have argued, with some plausibility, that they have just as much right to smoke in public buildings and workplaces as others have not to smoke. But medical research has steadily undermined their argument, and on Tuesday, the U.S. surgeon general demolished it.

"The debate is over," Richard Carmona told a televised news conference. His report, compiling all available medical evidence, concludes that there is massive, incontrovertible evidence that secondhand smoke causes lung cancer, heart disease and other illnesses in adults. Children exposed to smoke suffer an increased risk of respiratory conditions and sudden infant death syndrome. Even short exposures can start nonsmokers toward disease, damaging the linings of blood vessels and airways.

As an old saying goes, you have a right to swing your arms, but it ends where the next person's nose begins. If the punch comes from cigarette smoke instead, the reasoning is no different -- and increasingly is accepted.

Since 1994, 14 states have banned smoking in workplaces, restaurants or bars, and more than 2,000 local governments now restrict the habit in some form.

The surgeon general's findings should accelerate the trend. They leave no credible alternative. No-smoking sections or separate ventilation systems don't provide adequate protection, Carmona concluded. Only smoke-free environments prevent risk.

After the report came out, a spokesman for R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co. tried to mount a

counterattack, arguing that business owners have the right to decide on their own smoking policies. "People who don't want to work around it don't have to work at that establishment," David Howard said.

But that logic, too, is flawed. State and local governments have dramatically lowered the nation's once-appalling record of workplace deaths and injuries by requiring everything from hard hats to fire extinguishers. To argue that workers in restaurants, bars, casinos and other smoke-prone environments don't deserve similar protection from a proven health threat rings hollow. People should not be forced to choose between making a living and endangering their health.

The tougher problem is addressing the threat secondhand smoke poses: at home, where the government's long arm cannot -- and should not -- reach. The report puts parents on notice that if they care about their children's health, they cannot continue to smoke at home. But any success will require a large public education effort -- a particularly fitting use for the money states won in the late '90s after suing the tobacco companies.

In today's context, Carmona's findings won't shock the nation the way another surgeon general did 42 years ago by finding that smoking causes lung cancer. But it is an interesting benchmark. In the 1960s, smoking was pervasive. Doctors appeared in tobacco ads. At the U.S. Public Health Service, conference tables were dotted with ashtrays. Some 42% of adults smoked.

Today, less than 21% do, and smoking is widely scorned.

Yet, 126 million adults and children are still exposed to secondhand smoke at work and home. That's reason enough for smokers to keep their habit to themselves.

The science is not in

Opposing view: Danger of secondhand smoke still debatable and doesn't justify bans.

By Jacob Sullum

Surgeon General Richard Carmona says secondhand smoke is a deadly public health hazard, lending support to government bans on smoking in private businesses. Surgeons general have been saying the same thing for two decades, but that doesn't make it right.

The dangers posed by secondhand smoke are debatable and likely to remain so given the limitations of epidemiology. It's well established that tobacco smoke can raise the risk of diseases such as lung cancer and heart disease. The question is how much it takes.

Because the doses absorbed by non-smokers exposed to secondhand smoke are much smaller than those absorbed by smokers, any health risks would be so small that it is difficult to confirm them in studies comparing, say, the spouses of smokers with the spouses of non-smokers. The weak, statistically insignificant associations typically found in such studies are consistent with a low-level risk.

They are also consistent with no risk at all if, for example, factors associated with mar-

riage to a smoker (such as poor diet, lack of exercise, or unreported smoking by subjects believed to be lifetime non-smokers) independently raise disease risks. The surgeon general's report mentions such problems but concludes they probably cannot fully account for the observed associations. The truth is we don't know for sure and probably never will.

Nonetheless, I doubt that the average person encountering tobacco smoke in a bar or restaurant objects to it because he thinks his tiny risk of lung cancer might go up slightly if he stays there for several decades. The main complaint, as always, is the immediate smell and discomfort. Even if there is an added element of anxiety about long-term health consequences, that does not justify imposing a one-size-fits-all solution on every business in the country. Whether secondhand smoke is a health hazard or merely a nuisance, people who want to avoid it can do so by avoiding businesses that allow smoking. A free society that respects diversity should make room for people with different preferences.

Jacob Sullum, a senior editor at Reason magazine, is the author of For Your Own Good: The Anti-Smoking Crusade and the Tyranny of Public Health.

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USA Today

Secondhand smoke debate 'over'

Surgeon general says new report clears the air

By Liz Szabo
USA TODAY

WASHINGTON — Never mind the non-smoking sections or even good ventilation systems in bars, restaurants or offices. Secondhand smoke is a health hazard at any level, a new report from the U.S. surgeon general says.

The 700-page report cites "massive and conclusive scientific evidence" of the "alarming" public health threat posed by secondhand smoke and finds smoking bans are the only way to protect non-smokers.

"The debate is over," Surgeon General Richard Carmona said in issuing the report Tuesday. "The science is clear. Secondhand smoke is not a mere annoyance but a serious health hazard."

Although many states and hundreds of cities have passed smoke-free laws, more than 126 million Americans ages 3 and older continue to be exposed to secondhand smoke, according to the report. Nearly 50,000 non-smokers die from secondhand smoke each year.

Carmona said non-smokers exposed to secondhand smoke at home or work increase their risk of heart disease and cancer by up to 30%. Even brief exposure to smoke damages cells, beginning a process that can lead to cancer, and increases the risk of blood clots, which can cause heart attacks and strokes.

The report expands on the landmark 1986 report from Surgeon General C. Everett Koop, the first to conclude that secondhand smoke causes disease.

Carmona also urged parents not to smoke around children, noting that many children are exposed in the home. He stopped short of calling for specific legislation or other government regulation to restrict indoor smoking, noting that his role was simply to provide accurate information. "The strength of this movement is in the communities," Carmona said.

Anti-tobacco activists said the report is a blueprint for future action. Matthew



By Sylwia Kapusewska, Getty Images

It's all bad: Customers smoke at a Hoboken, N.J., bar a day before a state ban on smoking in public places took effect April 15. A report says no amount of secondhand smoke is safe and smoking bans are the only way to protect non-smokers.

Annual toll

Secondhand smoke kills:	In children, it causes:
46,000 adult non-smokers from heart disease	790,000 ear infections
3,000 adult non-smokers from lung cancer	200,000 episodes of asthma
430 newborns from sudden infant death syndrome	At least 24,000 low-birth-weight or preterm deliveries
	Source: U.S. Surgeon General

Myers, president of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, said all states and communities should immediately ban

smoking in all workplaces: "Anything else leaves Americans' health at risk."

The report does provide strong support for smoke-free laws. Contrary to tobacco industry-financed studies, smoke-free policies do not hurt business for bars, restaurants and other venues, the report concludes. The report strongly criticizes the tobacco industry for financing biased studies to undermine carefully conducted, peer-reviewed research on the economic effects of smoking bans in an effort to "sustain controversy even as the scientific community reached consensus."

Bars and restaurants should be allowed to decide on the policies that best suit their clients, said David Howard, a spokesman for R.J. Reynolds Tobacco. "Adults should be able to patronize establishments that permit smoking if they choose to do so," he says. "People who don't want to work around it don't have to work at that establishment."

R.J. Reynolds Tobacco does not dispute the science in the surgeon general's report, Howard said.

The report notes that bartenders, waiters and waitresses are exposed to some of the highest levels of secondhand smoke, putting them at greater risk of disease. "No employee should be forced to choose between making a living and increasing the risk of heart disease and lung disease," Myers said. "No employer should be allowed to place their employees at risk."

Thanks to smoke-free air laws, fewer Americans today are exposed to secondhand smoke, the report says. Yet more than 40% of non-smoking adults and nearly 60% of children ages 3 to 11 are exposed to secondhand smoke.

Because children's lungs are still developing, children exposed to smoke have twice the level of a nicotine by-product in their blood as adult non-smokers.

2nd-hand smoke risk 'indisputable'

Danger called especially dire for children

By Marc Kaufman
The Washington Post

Should smoking be banned in public spaces? Vote now at StarNewsOnline.com

Secondhand smoke dramatically increases the risk of heart disease and lung cancer in nonsmokers and can be controlled only by making indoor spaces smoke-free, according to a comprehensive report issued Tuesday by U.S. Surgeon General Richard

is not a mere annoyance. It is a serious health hazard that can lead to disease and premature death in children and nonsmoking adults."

Carmona. "The health effects of secondhand smoke exposure are more pervasive than we previously thought," Carmona said. "The scientific evidence is now indisputable: Secondhand smoke

THE REPORT'S FINDINGS

Even the most sophisticated ventilation systems cannot eliminate secondhand smoke, and only smoke-free environments are risk-free, the surgeon general called state and local mandates for smoke-free buildings a major public-health success that have had enormous positive effects. Levels of cotinine, a biological marker for secondhand smoke exposure, have fallen by 70 percent in nonsmokers since the late 1980s, he said. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated last year that exposure to secondhand smoke kills more than 3,000 nonsmokers from lung cancer, approximately 46,000 from heart disease, and as many as 430 newborns from sudden infant death syndrome.

SMOKE

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work increases the nonsmokers' risk of developing heart disease by 25 to 30 percent and lung cancer by 20 to 30 percent. It is especially dangerous for children living with smokers and is known to cause sudden infant death syndrome, respiratory problems, ear infections and asthma attacks in infants and children.

The report — which was applauded and embraced by public health and tobacco-control advocates — found that nearly half of all nonsmoking Americans are still regularly exposed to smoke from others. It concludes that any exposure to secondhand smoke is a risk to nonsmokers, and as a result the only way to protect nonsmokers is to eliminate indoor smoking.

"Restrictions on smoking can control exposures effectively, but technical approaches involving air cleaning or a greater exchange of indoor with outdoor air cannot," the report says. "Consequently, nonsmokers need protection through restriction of smoking in public places and workplaces and by a voluntary adherence to policies at home, particularly to eliminate exposures of children.

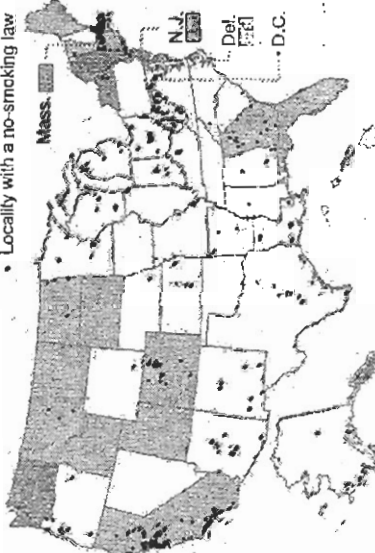
Smoking slowly being rubbed out

New Jersey is the newest state to join a growing number of others to place a ban on smoking. As of July 1, 2006, 17 states will have no-smoking laws in effect, along with 461 towns, cities and counties.

State no-smoking laws

 Banned in all workplaces, restaurants and bars

 Locality with a no-smoking law



NOTE: Some states allow for separate smoking areas in workplaces

SOURCE: Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights

AP

The report represents the strongest statement about smoking and tobacco control to come out during the Bush administration — which received millions in campaign donations from the tobacco industry.

The administration has been neutral or negative about two major tobacco control initiatives — proposals to grant the Food and Drug Administration authority to regulate tobacco, and enacting the World Health Organization global treaty on tobacco. The WHO treaty, for

instance, was signed by the administration but has never been sent to the Senate for a ratification vote.

The tobacco industry has been somewhat divided on the dangers of secondhand smoke, with R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Co. saying that the science remains inconclusive and Philip Morris USA generally willing to accept public-health advocates' conclusions. All the companies, however, were accused by the Justice Department of conspiring to undercut the scientific consensus on secondhand smoke, and that charge remains part of the department's suit against them.

A Philip Morris spokeswoman said Tuesday that the company was reviewing the report, while R.J. Reynolds spokesman David Howard said that the report "does not change our views about secondhand smoke." He said that the company continued to believe that owners of bars, nightclubs and other places restricted to adults should decide whether to allow smoking.

On its Web site Tuesday, the company said "there are still legitimate scientific questions concerning the reported risks of secondhand smoke."

The report finds that even the most sophisticated ventilation systems cannot eliminate secondhand smoke and that

only smoke-free environments are risk-free. Carmona called state and local mandates for smoke-free buildings a major public-health success that have had enormous positive effects. Levels of cotinine, a biological marker for secondhand smoke exposure, have fallen by 70 percent in nonsmokers since the late 1980s, he said.

The report does not present new scientific data, but rather is an analysis of the best research on secondhand smoke. It said, for instance, that the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimated last year that exposure to secondhand smoke kills more than 3,000 nonsmokers from lung cancer, approximately 46,000 from coronary heart disease, and as many as 430 newborns from sudden infant death syndrome.

"This report once and for all ends any scientific debate about whether exposure to secondhand smoke is a cause of serious diseases like lung cancer and heart disease," Matthew Myers of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids said.

The report, he said, "leads to one inescapable conclusion: Only comprehensive smoke-free workplace laws can protect all workers and the public from the serious, proven health risks of secondhand smoke...."

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