

Second hand smoke information sheet

Tobacco smoke contains 4,000 toxins and chemicals, 60 of which are known cancer-causing agents. Only 15% of a cigarette is inhaled by the smoker, the remaining 85% of the cigarette is given off in smoke into the atmosphere – and inhaled by those around the smoker. This, and the smoke that smokers exhale, is known as ‘second hand smoke’.

The Government’s Scientific Committee on Tobacco and Health has twice looked at the harm that second hand smoke causes to health. In November 2004, they published a report which found that non-smokers had an increased risk of lung cancer (by 24%) and an increased risk of coronary heart disease (by 25%) if exposed to second hand smoke. The Committee condemned second hand smoke as a “health hazard”.

Profesor Jamrozik, of Imperial College, London, published his report, *Estimate of deaths attributable to passive smoking among UK adults*, in the British Medical Journal in April 2005. This report revealed that 11,000 people die in the UK each year due to illnesses caused by exposure to second hand smoke – that’s 30 people each day. The report stated that 617 deaths in the workplace each year could be attributed to second hand smoke exposure, and that these deaths are particularly high in the hospitality industry – 54 deaths each year, which breaks down to one death each week.

The Government recognised that workers should be protected from second hand smoke in the workplace, as they are from other health hazards, such as asbestos. The Health Act 2006 will ensure that from summer 2007 all workers will work in environments free from tobacco smoke.