

Frequently Asked Questions

Why do we need smoke-free entryway policies?

We need smoke-free entryway policies to protect the public from secondhand smoke. When California passed the landmark Smoke-Free Workplace Act (AB 13), which made virtually all indoor workplaces smoke-free, it was a huge step toward protecting the public from secondhand smoke. However, smokers now congregate in entryways, creating an unhealthy zone that everyone coming or going must enter.

People inside the building are also at risk. Smoke around entryways can drift into the buildings or be sucked in by powerful ventilation systems.

Californians want smoke-free outdoor air. Of those polled, 82 percent of nonsmokers and 59 percent of smokers agree that workplaces should designate smoke-free zones around all building entrances.

California Assembly Bill 846, which went into effect January 1, 2004, prohibits smoking within 20 feet of entryways and windows of all city, county or state owned or leased buildings in the state. All workers, not just government employees, deserve to have this protection around their workplace.

Smoke-free entryway policies are good for business. They keep entryways free from loitering so that customers or clients are greeted with a more professional atmosphere when entering office buildings or other businesses. Besides, 82 percent of Californians don't smoke so most customers or clients don't want to smell or breathe in smoke as they enter the building.

What is the concern about secondhand smoke?

In 1993, the Environmental Protection Agency classified secondhand smoke as a Class A carcinogen, putting it in the same category as asbestos and radon. Class A carcinogens are known to cause cancer in humans.

Secondhand smoke contains more than 4,000 chemicals, including nicotine, arsenic, benzene, formaldehyde, and carbon monoxide. Many of these chemicals are poisonous and deadly.

Secondhand smoke kills nearly 3,000 nonsmokers each year from lung cancer in the United States and another 35,000 to 62,000 from coronary heart disease.

Exposure to secondhand smoke can have immediate health consequences, including eye, nose and throat irritation, as well as asthma attacks and breathing problems in people with chronic lung disease.

Secondhand smoke is especially harmful to children and has been linked to sudden infant death syndrome, low birth rates, acute lower respiratory infections, middle ear infections, asthma and other respiratory ailments.

Isn't it safe to smoke outside?

We used to think it was safe to smoke outdoors and encouraged smokers to step outside. While smoke does dissipate more quickly outdoors, studies conducted by former Environmental Protection Agency researcher James Repace and others show the deadly particles linger in the air long enough to be breathed into the lungs. The fact is secondhand smoke is not safe, not even outdoors.

Why is 20 feet the minimum distance required?

Researcher James Repace and other environmental tobacco smoke experts at the University of California at Berkeley and the University of California at San Francisco agree that 20 feet from a doorway is adequate to protect from the carcinogenic particles in secondhand smoke.

It is consistent with the state law which currently prohibits smoking within 20 feet of the entryways of all city, county or state owned or leased buildings in the state.

Do smoke-free entryway policies work?

Cities, counties and businesses across California are finding that smoke-free entryway policies work with 26 percent of government jurisdictions and 23 percent of private businesses already having smoke-free entryway policies in place that range from 20 to 50 feet.

Cities include: Albany, Berkeley, Davis, Fremont, Oakland, Palo Alto, Pleasanton, Rancho Cucamonga, Sacramento, San Fernando, San Ramon, Santa Barbara, and Union City.

Counties include: Marin, Shasta, San Mateo, Santa Barbara, and Yolo.

Many hospitals, health centers and other businesses have smoke-free entryway policies, including Kaiser Permanente, St. Joseph's Hospital, Colusa Regional

Medical Center, Darin Camerena Health Center, Foothill Community Clinics, Cathay Bank and Mechanics Bank.

The State of California passed a smoke-free entryway law which protects the entryways of all city, county or state owned or leased buildings. This law, California Assembly Bill 846, bans smoking within 20 feet of the entryways, operable windows, and ventilation systems of these buildings.

How do we enforce smoke-free entryway policies?

For those cities, counties and businesses that have already passed smoke-free entryway ordinances, enforcement has not been an issue. The key components of enforcement and compliance are signage and public awareness. In the vast majority of cases, smoke-free entryway policies are self-enforcing. When people see the no-smoking signs they don't smoke there.

Are smoke-free laws fair to smokers?

Smoke-free laws are fair to smokers. Both federal and state courts have determined there is no legal right to smoke. These policies do not keep smokers from smoking, they just restrict where smoking can occur just as other laws restrict where activities can occur in public. We aren't allowed to drink alcohol in entryways either. We live in a society where millions of people have to coexist together, so we must set policies that protect the rights of all people. The public has a right not to be subjected to a deadly substance.

Are there any other benefits?

Another benefit of smoke-free policies is they help to reduce tobacco use, the number one preventable cause of death and disease in this country. Smoke-free policies encourage smokers to quit and make it easier for those trying to quit to succeed. They also help to reduce tobacco use by de-glamorizing smoking and making it less attractive to young people.

Sample Letters to the Editor/Policymakers

Dear Editor:

As a respiratory therapist, I know firsthand the dangers of smoking. Many of my patients suffer from chronic lung problems as a result of their addiction to nicotine. But what I also see are spouses who have breathing problems as a result of their exposure to secondhand smoke. That's why I am urging (city/county) to adopt the smoke-free entryway ordinance.

We need to protect the public from secondhand smoke, which is a deadly combination of more than 4,000 chemicals, many of which are poisonous. Secondhand smoke was classified as a Class A carcinogen by the Environmental Protection Agency in 1993. Since then, we've made great progress in California to reduce the public's exposure to secondhand smoke. The landmark Smoke-Free Workplace Act virtually made all indoor workplaces smoke-free, including bars and restaurants.

However, now smokers congregate outside at the entryways of office buildings and other businesses. That means employees, customers and others who enter the building are forced to breathe in the secondhand smoke.

All buildings in (city/county) should have a smoke-free zone around the entryways to protect the public from chronic lung disease, heart disease, and other health problems.

Signed,

Dear Editor:

I am surprised at the number of people who don't realize secondhand smoke is dangerous, even outdoors. While tobacco smoke can dissipate quicker outside, it still hangs in the air where it can be breathed into the lungs.

We need the proposed smoke-free entryway ordinance to protect public health.

The Environmental Protection Agency has classified secondhand smoke as a Class A carcinogen, which means it causes cancer in humans. It contains more than 4,000 chemicals, including arsenic, benzene and formaldehyde. If you don't believe secondhand smoke is deadly, talk to the families of the 3,000 nonsmokers who died from lung cancer last year because they were exposed to secondhand smoke.

Signed,

Dear Editor:

I am a smoker but I still support the proposed smoke-free entryway ordinance. I think everyone knows tobacco smoke is bad for you. It doesn't really matter whether you're sucking it off the end of a cigarette or inhaling the nasty particles from the air. Eventually, it will kill you.

In fact, the Environmental Protection Agency has classified secondhand smoke as a carcinogen, which means it causes cancer in humans. It isn't hard to understand why. Tobacco smoke contains more than 4,000 chemicals, many of which are poisonous.

I made a choice to smoke and I understand I can either quit or suffer the consequences. But what about the people around me, should they also risk their health because I want to smoke? I think not.

Creating a smoke-free zone around office buildings is a small price to pay to protect public health. Take it from a smoker.

Signed,

Dear Editor:

The time is now for a smoke-free entryway ordinance. I am shocked and dismayed that our public officials would even consider not passing such an

important public health measure, especially since we know secondhand smoke causes cancer and a host of other health problems, including heart disease.

It's been 10 years since the Environmental Protection Agency classified secondhand smoke as a Class A carcinogen, putting it in the same category with asbestos and radon. So what are we waiting for? To me asking people to expose themselves to secondhand smoke when they enter or exit a building is like asking an asbestos cleanup crew to go in unprotected.

The California passed Assembly Bill 846 last year, which protects workers in local or state government owned buildings from entryway smoke. All workers, not just government employees, deserve to have this protection around their workplace.

I implore our elected leaders to do the right thing and pass the smoke-free entryway ordinance.

Signed,

Dear Editor:

I am part of the majority of Californians who don't smoke and I support the proposed ordinance to ban smoking in entryways because I'm concerned about continually being exposed to the toxic chemicals contained in secondhand smoke. And I'm not alone. Nearly 82 percent of nonsmokers agree that workplaces should designate smoke-free areas around all building entrances. In fact, the same Field Poll found that even 59 percent of smokers agreed.

I work in an office and not only do I have to enter the building through a cloud of smoke, I can smell it at my desk because every time the front door opens, the smoke comes inside. It seems that if smokers stood at least 20 feet from the entryway, it would reduce everyone's exposure to smoke.

Signed,

Making the Case

It's been 10 years since the Environmental Protection Agency classified secondhand smoke as a Class A carcinogen – the same category as asbestos and radon – and yet we are still exposing the public to it. While California has made great strides in reducing the public's exposure to secondhand smoke indoors, we still need to do much more to protect the public from secondhand smoke outdoors.

Smoke-Free Entryways are Needed to Protect Public Health

Now that virtually all indoor workplaces in California are smoke-free thanks to the Smoke-Free Workplace Act (AB 13), smokers congregate outside at building entryways creating unhealthy smoke-filled areas that everyone coming or going must enter.

We know secondhand smoke causes cancer and other health problems. It contains more than 4,000 chemicals, many of which are toxic, and there is no safe exposure level. Secondhand smoke kills nearly 3,000 nonsmokers each year from lung cancer and as many as 62,000 from coronary heart disease.

Smoking in entryways poses a continued health risk because workers and customers are subjected to secondhand smoke when they enter or leave the building. Secondhand smoke can also drift into buildings or be sucked in by powerful ventilation systems. A minimum 20-foot smoke-free zone provides a buffer around entryways, windows and ventilation areas to reduce smoke exposure.

The state of California recognized and began to tackle the hazard of entryway smoke by passing Assembly Bill 846, which went into effect January 1, 2004. This new law prohibits smoking within 20 feet of entryways and windows of all city, county or state owned or leased buildings in the state.

Secondhand Smoke is a Health Hazard Even Outdoors

We used to think smoking outside was safe. But studies conducted by James Repace show that secondhand smoke is as deadly outdoors as it is indoors. (Banning Outdoor Smoking is Scientifically Justifiable, *Tobacco Control Digest*, March 2000).

Repace has been conducting research on secondhand smoke for 25 years and is a former staff scientist for the Environmental Protection Agency. He found that when there is little or no wind, the smoke plume rises to a certain height, and then descends because the combustion particles and gases in secondhand smoke are heavier than air. Those deadly particles can then be breathed in by others, just as they can indoors.

Repace and other environmental tobacco smoke experts at the University of California at Berkeley and the University of California at San Francisco agree that 20 feet from a doorway is the minimum distance required to protect from the carcinogenic particles in secondhand smoke.

Californians Want Smoke-Free Entryways

The fact is most Californians (82 percent) don't smoke and don't want to be around tobacco smoke, even outdoors. A Field Poll conducted in 2001 found that 82 percent of nonsmokers polled agree that workplaces should designate smoke-free areas around all building entrances. Even 59 percent of smokers agree entryways should be smoke-free.

Other surveys have found similar results. In Sacramento County, a survey of public employees found that 87 percent wanted smoke-free entryways. In Yolo County, 88 percent of employees surveyed favored smoke-free entryways.

Smoke-Free Entryways are Good for Business

Smoke-free entryway policies are good for business because they keep entryways free from loitering so customers or clients are greeted with a more professional atmosphere when entering office buildings or other businesses. Most Californians are nonsmokers and want smoke-free entryways so it stands to reason they would be more likely to frequent businesses where they don't have to contend with secondhand smoke just to get inside.

Smoke-Free Policies Reduce Tobacco Use

Smoke-free policies help to reduce tobacco use because they make smoking inconvenient and unattractive, which encourages smokers to quit and makes it easier for those trying to quit to succeed. Smoke-free policies also de-glamorize smoking, making it less attractive to young people.

Smoking is the number one preventable cause of death and disease in this country, killing more than 42,000 Californians every year and costing the state billions of dollars. Anything we can do to help reduce tobacco use will help save lives and tax dollars.

Message Points

- It's been 10 years since the Environmental Protection Agency classified secondhand smoke as a Class A carcinogen – the same category as asbestos and radon – and yet we are still exposing the public to it.
- Every year in the United States, 3,000 nonsmokers die prematurely from lung cancer and as many as 62,000 nonsmokers die prematurely from coronary heart disease due to secondhand smoke.
- Exposure to secondhand smoke can have immediate health consequences, including eye, nose and throat irritation, as well as asthma attacks and breathing problems for people with chronic lung disease.
- Smoke-free entryway policies are needed to protect the public from secondhand smoke.
- Experts agree 20 feet from a doorway is the minimum distance required to adequately protect the public from secondhand smoke.
- Californians want smoke-free air outdoors as 82 percent of adults are nonsmokers.
- Of those polled, 82 percent of nonsmokers and 59 percent of smokers agree that workplaces should designate smoke-free areas around all building entrances.
- Smoking around building entryways creates an unhealthy zone that everyone coming or going must enter.
- Smoke around entryways can drift into the buildings or be sucked in by powerful ventilation systems, subjecting people inside the building to unhealthy levels of secondhand smoke.
- Smoke-free entryway policies keep entryways free from loitering so that customers are greeted with a more professional atmosphere when entering office buildings and other businesses.
- Smoke-free policies encourage smokers to quit and make it easier for those trying to quit to succeed.
- Smoke-free policies help to reduce tobacco use by de-glamorizing smoking and making it less attractive to young people.
- U.S. and California Courts have declared there is no legal right to smoke.
- To protect government employees and those who visit government buildings, California passed Assembly Bill 846, which went into effect January 1, 2004. This bill prohibits smoking within 20 feet of entryways and windows of all city, county or state owned or leased buildings in the state.
- Cities and counties across California are adopting smoke-free entryway policies to protect public health and reduce tobacco use.
- Enforcement has not been a problem to date. The key components of enforcement and compliance are signage and public awareness.

Sample Op-Ed

Smoke-Free Entryways Protect Public Health

Secondhand smoke is deadly. Think about it the next time you enter a building and are forced to breathe in a lung full of smoke.

It's been 10 years since the Environmental Protection Agency classified secondhand smoke as a Class A carcinogen – the same category as asbestos and radon – and yet we are still exposing the public to it. We need the proposed smoke-free entryway ordinance to better protect the public from secondhand smoke.

Every year in the United States, 3,000 nonsmokers die prematurely from lung cancer and as many as 62,000 nonsmokers die from coronary heart disease due to secondhand smoke exposure. It can also have immediate health consequences, including eye, nose and throat irritation, as well as asthma attacks and breathing problems in people with chronic lung disease.

California has made a lot of progress in the last 10 years to reduce our exposure to secondhand smoke. Thanks to the landmark Smoke-Free Workplace Act (AB 13), virtually all indoor workplaces are smoke-free, including bars and restaurants. But what that means is smokers now congregate at the entryway of buildings and other businesses, making it almost impossible to enter or exit without walking through a cloud of smoke.

We used to think smoking outside was safe, and while tobacco smoke does dissipate more quickly outside, studies show the deadly particles linger in the air long enough to be breathed into the lungs. The fact is secondhand smoke is not safe, not even outdoors.

Allowing smoking in entryways also poses a threat to people inside the building. Smoke around entryways can drift into buildings or be sucked in by powerful ventilation systems.

California began to tackle this problem by passing Assembly Bill 846, which went into effect January 1, 2004. This new law prohibits smoking within 20 feet of entryways and windows of all city, county or state owned or leased buildings in the state. All workers, not just government employees, deserve to have this protection around their workplace.

Another benefit of the ordinance is that smoke-free policies encourage smokers to quit and make it easier for those trying to quit to succeed. They also help to reduce tobacco use by de-glamorizing smoking and making it less attractive to young people.

Smoking is the number one preventable cause of death and disease in this country, killing more than 42,000 Californians every year and costing the state billions of dollars. Anything we can do to reduce tobacco use will help save lives and tax dollars.

The proposed smoke-free entryway ordinance is a much-needed step toward reducing the death and disease caused by tobacco use.

Facts About Secondhand Smoke

Secondhand smoke is a mixture of smoke that is emitted into the air from a lit cigarette, cigar or pipe and smoke that is exhaled into the air.

Secondhand smoke causes premature death in nonsmokers and is a preventable health risk.

Secondhand smoke contains more than 4,000 chemicals, including nicotine, arsenic, benzene, formaldehyde, and carbon monoxide. Many of these chemicals are poisonous and deadly.

The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has classified secondhand smoke as a Class A carcinogen, a rating only used for substances proven to cause cancer.

Secondhand smoke kills nearly 3,000 nonsmokers each year from lung cancer in the United States and another 35,000 to 62,000 from coronary heart disease.

Exposure to secondhand smoke can have immediate health consequences, including eye, nose and throat irritation, as well as asthma attacks and breathing problems in people with chronic lung disease.

Secondhand smoke is especially harmful to children and has been linked to sudden infant death syndrome, low birth rates, acute lower respiratory infections, middle ear infections, asthma and other respiratory ailments.

The EPA has determined there is no safe exposure level to secondhand smoke.