

[Blowing smoke, third-hand](#) [1]

Written by [Charlotte Bowyer](#) [2] | Wednesday 17 March 2010

I tend to stay away from the 'health' sections of newspapers, mainly because I am rather bored of being told that I am a chronically unfit binge-drinker with a lifestyle leading unavoidably to obesity and depression. However, I'm surprised that I managed to miss hearing about the newest public health terror: [third hand smoke](#) [3].

According to new research done by Berkeley scientists, there is just no escaping the toxins of cigarette smoke (which the New York Times hastens to point out includes the spy-killing, radioactive, polonium 210.) Apparently, smoke residue on clothes, furniture and wallpaper can react with the common indoor pollutant nitrous gas to cause the wonderfully sinister sounding 'tobacco-specific nitrosamines', or TSNAs. And it seems that nowhere is safe. A Berkeley spokesperson points out that "nicotine residues will stick to a smoker's skin and clothing. Those residues follow a smoker back inside and get spread everywhere." Indeed, the smoker's selfish behavior will particularly harm young children, who will innocently touch, suck and even breathe in close proximity to the infected materials.

The finding of this research has led to the Berkeley scientists issuing a dramatic conclusion: buildings, rooms and public places should be 100% smoke free, and nicotine-laden furniture, carpets and curtains replaced to prevent any further toxic leakage. In any circumstance this is a rather hysterical course of action to take, but what makes it so ridiculous is that the BBC reports the very same scientists are "doing more research to better understand what threat, if any, TSNAs pose." Yes, that's right: it's not just that the danger hadn't been proven ? in fact, it hadn't even been studied. As FOREST's Simon Clark put it, this is "propaganda dressed up as science."

Of course, the fact that there is no evidence to prove that TSNAs are actually a health hazard hasn't stopped UK ideologues and campaigners giving their twopenny's worth. Action on Smoking and Health insist "this study adds a new dimension to the dangers associated with smoking and provides further evidence of the need to protect...from exposure to tobacco smoke", while Cancer Research add the importance of making homes and cars smoke-free.

Despite contributing nearly £10bn a year to the public purse, smokers are increasingly treated as lepers by the government and by scientists with a holier-than-thou attitude. Any attempts to further ostracize smokers would be authoritarian and unnecessary at the best of times, but for scientists and lobbyists to push an agenda with no scientific backing is simply crazy.

P.S. Over at thefreesociety.org ^[4], Chris Snowdon looks at 'third-hand smoke' in a little more detail.

[blog comments powered by Disqus](#) ^[6]

Source URL: <http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/health/blowing-smoke-third-hand>

Links:

[1] <http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/health/blowing-smoke-third-hand>

[2] <http://www.adamsmith.org/taxonomy/term/5805>

[3] <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/8503870.stm>

[4] <http://www.thefreesociety.org/Issues/Smoking/thirdhand-smoke-fever-a-further-example-of-prejudice-and-propaganda>

[5] http://disqus.com/?ref_noscript

[6] <http://disqus.com>