



## The U. S. Surgeon General Report, *The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke*

On June 27, 2006, the U.S. Surgeon General released *The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke*, which reports the harmful effects of involuntary exposure to secondhand smoke. The report's findings prove that Virginia's hospitality employees work in hazardous environments, and that our General Assembly must pass a smokefree workplaces bill before it adjourns in 2007. The report's major conclusions include:

- 1) Secondhand smoke exposure causes disease and premature death in children and adults who do not smoke.**
  - Secondhand smoke contains hundreds of toxic or carcinogenic (cancer-causing) chemicals, including formaldehyde, benzene, vinyl chloride, arsenic, ammonia, and hydrogen cyanide.
  - The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health has concluded that secondhand smoke is an occupational carcinogen.
  
- 2) Exposure of adults to secondhand smoke has immediate adverse effects on the cardiovascular system and causes coronary heart disease and lung cancer.**
  - Breathing secondhand smoke for even a short time can have immediate adverse effects on the cardiovascular system and interferes with the normal functioning of the heart, blood, and vascular systems in ways that increase the risk of a heart attack.
  - Nonsmokers who are exposed to secondhand smoke at home or at work can increase their risk of developing heart disease and lung cancer by as much as 30 percent.
  
- 3) Children exposed to secondhand smoke are at an increased risk for sudden infant death syndrome, acute respiratory infections, ear problems, and more severe asthma.**
  - Because their bodies are developing, infants and young children are especially vulnerable to the poisons in secondhand smoke.
  - Babies who are exposed to secondhand smoke after birth have weaker lungs than unexposed babies, increasing their risk for many health problems.
  - Secondhand smoke exposure can cause asthmatic children to experience more frequent and severe attacks.
  
- 4) Separating smokers from nonsmokers, cleaning the air, and ventilating buildings cannot eliminate exposures of nonsmokers to secondhand smoke.**
  - Conventional air cleaning systems can remove large particles, but not the smaller particles or the gases found in secondhand smoke.
  - Routine operation of a heating, ventilating, and air conditioning system can distribute secondhand smoke throughout a building.

### Citation

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. *The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke: A Report of the Surgeon General*. U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, 2006.