

THIRDHAND SMOKE Resource Center

What should I ask before renting a car?

Thirdhand smoke is the chemical residue from tobacco smoke. It is also called “tobacco smoke residue” or “stale tobacco smoke.” The chemicals in thirdhand smoke are toxic to humans, especially children. It can linger for years in dust and on household surfaces. It can also become embedded in carpets, furniture, clothes, and building materials. It is difficult and expensive to remove.

You need to rent a car. Whether for business or pleasure, a little bit of research and a few simple steps can maximize your chances of a ride 100% free of tobacco smoke pollutants.

Before reserving your car:

1. Choose a rental car company that advertises non-smoking vehicles. Better yet, choose a rental car company with a no smoking policy for all of their vehicles.
2. Read the non-smoking policy to make sure it includes electronic cigarettes.
3. Make sure the fine for violating the policy is enough to make someone think twice before lighting up in the car.
4. Specify on your reservation that you will only accept a non-smoking vehicle.

At the rental counter:

1. Verbally confirm that you want a smokefree car (even if the company has a no smoking policy).
2. Request a car that has low mileage (fewer drivers mean fewer opportunities for smoking to have occurred).

Before you drive out of the rental car lot:

1. Be sure the car is designated in some way as “non-smoking”, such as a sticker on the car window (reminders inside the vehicle reduce chances a previous renter smoked inside the car).
2. Look for evidence of tobacco use (litter, burn marks, cloudy windows inside, odor of tobacco).
3. If you are not convinced the vehicle is non-smoking, request another vehicle.



When you return the vehicle:

1. Reinforce the rental company's good choices (thank the management and staff for providing non-smoking vehicles).
2. Post a positive review about your smokefree ride and share it on social media.

Updated June 2022

Sources

Matt GE, Fortmann AL, Quintana PJ, Zakarian JM, Romero RA, Chatfield DA, Hoh E, & Hovell MF. Towards smoke-free rental cars: An evaluation of voluntary smoking restrictions in California. *Tob Control*. 2013; 22(3):201-7.

Matt GE, Quintana JP, Hovell MF, Chatfield D, Ma DS, Romero R, & Uribe A. Residual tobacco smoke pollution in used cars for sale: Air, dust, and surfaces. *Nicotine Tob Res*. 2008;10(9):1467-1475. doi: 10.1080/14622200802279898



