

THIRDHAND SMOKE Resource Center

Does thirdhand smoke decrease my home's value?

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.

When people smoke inside their home, the chemicals in tobacco smoke build up over time and leave toxic thirdhand smoke residue on carpets, furniture, walls, doors, and ceilings. This toxic residue lingers long after smoking stops and can remain after previous smokers moved out. A survey of real estate agents suggests that evidence of thirdhand smoke in a home decreases its value. Characteristics like a stale tobacco smell, or stains on walls or fabrics can reduce the selling price of a home by as much as 30%. That means if you live in a neighborhood where most homes sell for about \$500,000, a similar home that smells like stale tobacco smoke will sell for around \$350,000.

There are a few reasons why smoked-in houses often sell for less money. Most people do not like the smell of stale tobacco smoke. Many people immediately experience negative physical symptoms when they smell stale tobacco smoke, such as shortness of breath, headaches, sore throat, or earaches. Finally, it is difficult and expensive to remove the toxic thirdhand smoke residue.

Finally, most people want to buy houses that have not been smoked in. With a smaller group of potential buyers willing to buy a home where someone smokes, there is no competition to increase the price. Real estate agents recognize that it is more difficult to sell a home with evidence of thirdhand smoke. It may also be more difficult for the seller to find a real estate agent.

In California, the Seller Property Questionnaire (Section M, Question 2, Revised 12/16, 6/18) asked buyers to disclose if any occupant has smoked tobacco on or in the property. However, this process does not exist in many other states. Despite warnings against thirdhand smoke pollution, most buyers and real estate agents are aware of the signs of indoor smoking. They also understand the challenges of cleaning thirdhand smoke inside a home. It is not unusual for a potential buyer to ask the seller's agent about the smoking history of a home, even if there is no odor of stale tobacco smoke. A reputable professional will not lie.



THIRDHAND SMOKE Resource Center

An educated buyer will also ask the home inspector if there is evidence of tobacco use. Lastly, an educated buyer knows that the strong smell of air fresheners, scented candles, or the unexpected use of fans may be an attempt to hide a stale tobacco smell.

If someone in your household smokes and you are concerned about your home's value, the first thing to do is to ask them to stop smoking indoors. That will stop the build-up of thirdhand smoke. The next step is to clean all walls, ceilings, carpeting, fabric, and windows. Additional steps include cleaning the heating and air conditioning duct system to attempt to remove thirdhand smoke from surfaces. Depending on how much thirdhand smoke has accumulated, cleaning may be insufficient, and a full remediation may be required. Remediation includes drastic (and often expensive) measures, such as removal and replacement of sheet rock, flooring, and the heating and air conditioning system.

Tobacco smoke residue can significantly decrease your home's value. To avoid bad news when you sell your home, don't allow tobacco use or vaping on or in your property. If thirdhand smoke has already accumulated, consult a remediation expert to make necessary repairs and improvements, and disclose the information to your real estate agenda and buyer.

Do you have more questions about the toxic legacy of tobacco smoke, how it affects human health, and what we can do about it? Learn more here.



Sources:

Klassen, AC, Lee, N, Lopez, JP, Bernardin, C, Coffman, R, & Tefferi, M (2020). Realtors as Partners in Tobacco Control: Results from a Pennsylvania Survey. *Tobacco Regulatory Science*, 6(6), 392-404.

Matt GE, Quintana PJ, Zakarian JM, Fortmann AL, Chatfield DA, Hoh E, Uribe AM, Hovell MF. When smokers move out and non-smokers move in: residential thirdhand smoke pollution and exposure. *Tob Control*. 2011;20(1):e1. doi: 10.1136/tc.2010.037382. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21037269>

Pfizer Canada. Quit to List Survey of Real Estate Agents and Brokers. 2013. Leger Marketing. Probasco, Jim. Six Things to Consider When Buying a House from Smokers. August 1, 2019. <https://www.investopedia.com/articles/investing/020617/6-things-consider-when-buying-house-smokers.asp>

Probasco, Jim. Six Things to Consider When Buying a House from Smokers. August 1, 2019. <https://www.investopedia.com/articles/investing/020617/6-things-consider-when-buying-house-smokers.asp>

This Old House. Understanding Thirdhand Smoke. Home Safety Videos. Retrieved from: <https://www.thisoldhouse.com/home-safety/21249597/understanding-thirdhand-smoke>

Up in smoke: Smoking in the home can lower resale value by tens of thousands. April 16, 2013. <https://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/up-in-smoke-smoking-in-the-home-can-lower-resale-value-by-tens-of-thousands-512275021.html>

