

Thirdhand Smoke Resource Center



What surfaces does thirdhand smoke stick to?

The Short Answer

Thirdhand smoke is the chemicals left behind when someone smokes tobacco. Thirdhand smoke is unhealthy for people and pets. It can stick around for a long time in homes and cars. It gets into your body if you inhale, swallow, or touch the chemicals. Getting rid of it is really hard and can cost a lot of money.

Thirdhand smoke sticks to:

Indoor Surfaces, such as:

- Walls
- Carpets
- Windows
- Doors

Household Objects, such as:

- Furniture
- Toys
- Books
- Dishes
- Bedding
- Curtains

People, including:

- Hair
- Skin
- Clothing

Thirdhand smoke can off-gas from these materials, and we can sometimes smell it as stale tobacco. The chemicals in thirdhand smoke can be spread by moving polluted objects from one place to another.

The Long Answer

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.

After tobacco smoke disappears, thirdhand smoke stays on surfaces, in dust, and on objects. Thirdhand smoke soaks into materials and sticks to most indoor surfaces. It can stick to walls, carpets, windows, and doors. It can stick to household objects, such as furniture, books, toys, dishes, silverware, curtains, blankets, and pillows. It can stick to skin, hair, and clothing too. People can carry thirdhand smoke from one place to another if they move polluted objects.

In an environment where someone smokes tobacco for years, thirdhand smoke contaminates every surface and object. This includes hidden surfaces, such as under tables, inside closets and drawers, in the spongy material underneath a carpet, and in wallboard and housing insulation. Some surfaces, such as drywall, carpets, and pillows, act like sponges soaking up water and storing toxic thirdhand smoke chemicals. Just like water evaporating from a wet sponge, these chemicals can be released back into the air, leading to exposure long after someone smokes. People can move thirdhand smoke chemicals from place to place, such as when someone moves furniture from a smoking home into a smokefree home or when someone enters a smokefree indoor space after a smoking break.

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](#).

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