Thirdhand Smoke Resource Center

What should I ask before renting a car?

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.

To improve your chances of getting a rental car 100% free of thirdhand chemical residue from smoking or vaping, take these steps:

1. Before renting your car, look for a company that does not allow smoking or vaping in any of their vehicles.
2. At the rental counter, remind them that you want a car that has not been smoked or vaped in. Asking for a low-mileage car can be beneficial in that there are fewer chances that a previous renter smoked or vaped in it.
3. Before driving away, check for odors, burn marks, stains, or other signs of smoking or vaping in the car. Ask for a different car if necessary.
4. When returning the car, thank the company for enforcing smokefree policies.

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.

When renting a car, a little bit of research and a few simple steps can increase the chances of getting a car 100% free of thirdhand chemical residue from smoking or vaping.

Before reserving your car:

1. Choose a rental car company with a no-smoking policy for all of their vehicles.
2. Read the no-smoking policy to make sure it includes vapes and electronic cigarettes.
3. Make sure the fine for violating the policy is severe enough to make someone think twice before smoking in the car.

At the rental counter:

1. Even if the company has a no-smoking policy, verbally confirm that you want a car that has not been smoked or vaped in.
2. Request a car that has a low mileage. The lower the mileage, the fewer previous renters and the fewer chances that a previous renter smoked or vaped in the car.

Before you drive out of the rental car lot:

1. Be sure there is some form of a “non-smoking” designation, such as a sticker on the car window or dashboard. Reminders reduce the chances that a previous renter smoked or vaped inside the car.
2. Look for evidence of tobacco use, such as a stale tobacco odor, burn marks, cloudy windows inside, and littered tobacco products.
3. If you feel that smoking or vaping might have occurred in the vehicle, request another one.

When you return the vehicle:

1. Reinforce the rental company’s good choices. Thank the management and staff for providing vehicles that have not been smoked or vaped in.
2. Post a positive review about your smokefree ride and share it on social media.

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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Sources:

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