Does thirdhand smoke decrease my home's value?

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 through your lungs, skin, and mouth. Getting rid of it is really hard and can cost a lot of money.

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 can decrease the value of a home by as much as 30%. To maintain the value of your home, never allow smoking or vaping on your property.

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 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 residents who smoked move out. Real estate agents know that evidence of smoking in a home — the smell of stale tobacco 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 homes that have been smoked in often sell for less money.

- Most people do not like the smell of stale tobacco smoke.
- Many people experience negative physical symptoms when they smell stale tobacco smoke, such as shortness of breath, headaches, sore throat, or earaches.
- It is difficult and expensive to remove the toxic thirdhand smoke residue.
- When homes are heavily polluted with thirdhand smoke, the buyer may have to pay for a full gut remodel to create a healthy home free of tobacco chemicals.

Most people want to buy houses that have not been smoked in, reducing the pool of potential buyers for a home where someone smoked. With fewer potential buyers, there

is less competition among potential buyers. Because real estate agents recognize that it is more difficult to sell a home that smells like stale tobacco smoke, it may be difficult to find an agent willing to list the home.

Required disclosure documents in many states, including California, currently do not ask about the smoking history of a home. However, the California Association of Realtors uses an additional document, called the *Seller Property Questionnaire*, that does ask sellers to disclose if they are aware of "any occupant of the property smoking or vaping any substance on or in the property, whether past or present."

Even though few jurisdictions require tobacco use disclosure, most buyers and real estate agents are familiar with the signs of indoor smoking and understand the challenges of cleaning thirdhand smoke inside a home.

If you own a home and someone in your household smokes or vapes, you should ask them to

- never smoke or vape inside the home and
- move far enough away from windows and doors that tobacco smoke and vape aerosols cannot drift back in the home.

A complete indoor smoking and vaping ban is the single most important strategy to reduce the build-up of thirdhand smoke.

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 the removal and replacement of carpets, drywall, wall insulation, flooring, built-in furniture and doors, and the heating and air conditioning system.

If you are buying a home, you should:

- Ask the seller's agent about the smoking history of the home.
- Inquire if there is an excessive use of air fresheners or candles.
- Ask the home inspector to look for signs of tobacco use.

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

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Sources:

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