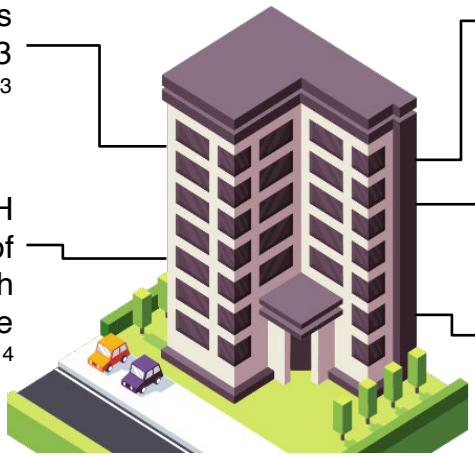
Persistent Toxic Thirdhand Smoke Residue in Multiunit Housing (MUH)

Thirdhand smoke is the toxic chemical residue left behind by tobacco smoke. It accumulates in carpets, walls, and furniture, becomes embedded in building materials, and persists for years after smoking stops.[1]

Most of California's MUH buildings were built in the 1970-80s when 1 in 3 Californians smoked.[2,3]

A recent study of California MUH found thirdhand smoke in 100% of units occupied by nonsmokers, with 10% of units at levels of active smokers.[4]



Polluted units put new occupants at risk of exposure to toxic chemicals that are listed under California's Prop 65.[5]

Standard cleaning procedures do not effectively remove thirdhand smoke.[6]

California's MUH residents are disproportionately disadvantaged.[7]

Policymakers may consider:

Disclosure

- Disclosure of past tobacco use and present thirdhand smoke levels promotes informed consumer purchases.
- Disclosure statements should include:
  a) Education of where thirdhand smoke comes from and its dangers.
  b) The smoking status of previous unit occupants.
  c) Results of thirdhand smoke environmental tests.
  d) Inspection reports about indicators of thirdhand smoke (e.g., discoloration, burn marks, odor).
  e) Information on how units are cleaned and renovated between leases.
- Property managers should be prohibited from masking the stale tobacco smell, for example with scents or fans.

Prevention

- Smokefree multiunit housing policies can prevent thirdhand smoke.[4]
- Smokefree multiunit housing policies receive high approval among residents and are associated with actual reduction in consumption.[8]
- Savings from averted healthcare, fire, and renovation costs exceed the initial implementation costs.[9,10]
- Effective policies use education, consulting, monitoring, and enforcement efforts.[8]

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Our mission is to share information, resources, and technical support with California's residents, communities, businesses, health care professionals, and policymakers about the toxic legacy of tobacco smoke residue and to achieve indoor environments that are 100% free of tobacco smoke toxicants.

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THIRDHAND SMOKE Resource Center

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