

# Smoking And The Nonsmoker: What Is The Issue?

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Over the past two and a half years the tobacco industry in this country has been besieged by anti-smokers armed with nothing more than a new mass of allegations. Yet the claim that tobacco smoke is harmful to the nonsmoker has been used to segregate smokers in public places and in some cases to ban smoking outright.

This new phenomenon, supported by ambiguous scientific studies, is attempting to make the consumer of tobacco products a "second-class citizen."

The instigator was Jesse L. Steinfeld, M.D., who served as Surgeon General of the United States Public Health Service from 1968 to early 1973.

On January 11, 1971, without documentation, the Surgeon General declared in a speech:

Evidence is accumulating that the nonsmoker may have untoward effects from the pollution his smoking neighbor forces upon him . . . It is high time to ban smoking from all confined public places such as restaurants, theaters, airplanes, trains, and buses . . .

Editorial comment on the Surgeon General's proposal included "to smoke or not is a right that should not be infringed upon by the federal law . . ." and an evaluation that the prohibition sought by the Surgeon General is "busybodiness mixed with arrogance."

No "evidence" was presented in the speech, nor in all four of the previous Public Health Service (PHS) reports to Congress required by law annually to keep lawmakers advised of current research findings regarding smoking and health. Until 1973, these reports were prepared by the Surgeon General as chief of the PHS.

But actions seeking to restrict or prohibit smoking on airplanes and buses were initiated before the Interstate Commerce Commission, the Federal Aviation Administration and the Civil Aeronautics Board by Ralph Nader and an organization called Action on Smoking and Health. Bills similarly relating to smoking restrictions in interstate transportation were introduced and are pending in Congress. At least a dozen state legislatures in 1973 were considering measures regarding smoking in public places or conveyances or places where "the public gathers."

Thus far no hearing or study of the matter by any of these bodies has demonstrated a hazard for nonsmokers. In one instance, the California Public Utilities Commission rejected a proposal to ban smoking on intercity buses, stating in its opinion that at its hearing "there was no testimony that the average nonsmoker's health is impaired by exposure to the smoke produced by a nearby smoker. The California agency further observed that tobacco smoke is usually less of a "bother" than public drinking, eating offensive-smelling food or compulsive talking.

CAB has ruled that air travelers must be seated separately according to smoking preference for mutual comfort — but not for health reasons which, as the Board found, did not exist. ICC ruled similarly for the convenience of interstate bus passengers — but again concluded there was no evidence of health hazards. (Bus operators have appealed the latter ruling).

A year after the Surgeon General's surprising move, and for the first time, his 1972 Public Health Service report to Congress on smoking and health attempted to give substance to his claim. In a chapter entitled "Public Exposure to Air Pollution from Tobacco Smoke," hardly convincing evidence was cited and — significantly — overwhelmingly contrary evidence either was glossed over or omitted. When all of the major evidence is considered, the claim of hazard to nonsmokers withstands neither a scientific nor "common sense" evaluation.

Most of the scientific work that has attempted to indict tobacco smoke as a health hazard to nonsmokers was conducted under extreme conditions, rarely if ever encountered by a person in a normal social situation. And yet the weight of this evidence fails to sustain the view that tobacco smoking harms those who do not smoke.

Perhaps the best answer lies in a simple equation of tolerance on the part of nonsmokers, and renewed courtesies on the part of those who enjoy tobacco.

If you're interested in a more detailed report on the pressing issue of smoking and the nonsmoker, write The Tobacco Institute and we'll be happy to provide more information.



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