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ENVIRONMENTAL TOBACCO SMOKE

Tobacco smoking has long been recognized as a major cause of death and disease, responsible for an estimated 434,000 deaths per year in the United States. After the Environmental Protection Agency and the Surgeon General stated that cigarettes cause lung cancer there was a tremendous movement to make cigarettes illegal. Now the debate is on environmental tobacco smoke also known as secondhand smoke, passive smoking, and sidestream smoke. The worry is that when non-smokers are exposed to secondhand smoke they face the same health hazards as smokers.

Tobacco smoke contains more than forty known carcinogens. Sidestream smoke carries these carcinogens into the air (Sussman 12). According to scientific studies tobacco smoke contains four thousand chemicals, and at least sixty are known to cause cancer. Carbon monoxide is the main gas in cigarette smoke. This gas competes with oxygen for binding sites on red blood cells, and results in depleting the body of oxygen (Q&A). Researchers studied 1,906 women of which 653 developed lung cancer. Women married to smokers were thirty percent more likely to develop lung cancer than those married to non-smokers (LeMaistre 1). According to the Environmental Protection Agency a thirty percent risk is only a small relative risk. The Environmental Protection Agency released its report stating that environmental tobacco smoke is a human lung carcinogen, responsible for approximately three thousand lung cancer deaths annually in American non-smokers. Environmental tobacco smoke has been classified as a Group A carcinogen, the highest ranking under the EPA's carcinogen assessment guidelines.