

A breath of fresh air

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It is common knowledge that second hand smoke is extremely dangerous for your health and even more dangerous to infants and children. Exposure to second hand smoke causes 150, 000 to 300, 000 acute lower respiratory tract infections (pneumonia and bronchitis) annually in children 18 months and younger; these infections result in 7, 500 to 15, 000 hospitalizations each year. Second hand smoke exposure causes buildup of fluid in the middle of the ear, resulting in childhood operations and of childhood hearing loss. A California EPA study estimates that 46, 000 (range is between 22, 700 and 69, 600) cardiovascular deaths, 3400 lung cancer deaths and 430 sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS) deaths are annually associated with second hand smoke exposure. 1 Many children are essentially forced to breathe in toxic fumes and particulates due to their parents', siblings', and surrounding elders' poor choices. Enforcing stricter smoking laws and regulations can drastically help the effects second hand smoke causes in children's health. " Choice" is a key word and the children do not have one. It is up to us, as responsible adults, to protect them and give them a healthy living environment for them to grow and develop in. Second- hand smoke, side-stream smoke or passive smoke can affect anyone near it, including innocent children which are sometimes overlooked. Infants and young children are especially susceptible since their lungs are still developing and childhood exposure to second hand smoke results in decreased lung function. Children who breathe second hand smoke are more likely to suffer from cough, wheeze, phlegm and breathlessness. 2 There are many ways we can help protect them with simple changes in the way we live today. While Environmental Tobacco Smoke exposure, otherwise known as ETS, is on the

decline in California due to increased public awareness of its harmful effects, smoking in vehicles still poses a very real threat to vehicle occupants, especially children. Smoking can cause respirable suspended particle, otherwise known as RSP, and CO levels in cars to reach high levels when the windows are open or closed. Recent research from the Harvard School of Public Health has shown that ETS in cars can reach levels comparable to smoky bars or restaurants. In addition, smoke can settle on car surfaces, including child safety seats, making it possible for children to pick up ETS with their fingers, which they may place in their mouths, causing them to ingest ETS particles. In fact, next to workplaces, homes and cars are considered the most unhealthy places in terms of ETS exposure, again particularly for children. 3 One step that we have made in the right direction towards car air quality for children, is Article 2. 5 Smoking in Motor Vehicles 118947, the Marco Firebaugh Memorial Children's Health and Safety Act of 2007, otherwise known as the " Smoke Free Cars" law. It was enforced as of January 1st 2008 and states that it is unlawful for a person to smoke a pipe, cigar, or cigarette in a motor vehicle, whether in motion or at rest, in which there is a minor. A violation of this section is an infraction punishable by a fine not exceeding one hundred dollars for each violation. Even though this new law is a great start to shielding children's health problems from second hand smoke, there are still things that can be changed within this same law to maximize its power. For instance, this law states that a law enforcement officer shall not stop a vehicle for the sole purpose of determining whether the driver is in violation of this article. This part of the act should be changed, giving law enforcement the power to stop a vehicle just to

determine whether a violation is taking place so that this law can have more of an impact. This act also punishes the violators by placing a fine of no more than one hundred dollars for each violation. I feel that this punishment is not enough and should be raised to a higher fine of at least two hundred and fifty dollars per offense with the ability for the fine amount to increase with each following offense. Higher penalties for the violation of this law would help make people understand the severity of their actions and hopefully change their habits. An act to amend Sections 19994. 30 and 19994. 33 of Part 2. 6 of Division 5 of the Government Code relating to tobacco, states that no public employee or member of the public shall smoke any tobacco product inside a public building, or in an outdoor area within twenty feet of a main exit, entrance, or operable window of a public building. When walking up to a building with people smoking twenty feet from the entrance, the presence of smoke is still very strong and apparent to almost anyone walking through it. Twenty feet from an entrance, exit, or operable window to a building is still too close for people to be smoking without risking second hand smoke effects. The current Surgeon General's Report states that there is no risk-free level of second hand smoke exposure. Even brief exposures can be harmful to children. 4 If this distance were to be changed to twice the amount, it would allow for a larger pathway to enter or exit a building without having to suffer from exposure we are currently bare to under the current law of only twenty feet. Another part of today's law that should be revisited and updated is the current smoking age. The California law for buying tobacco products (cigarettes) is eighteen. up the habit before the age of twenty-one. 5 Raising the required age to purchase cigarettes to twenty-

five would greatly shrink the potential dangers of having ignorant and uneducated smokers poisoning others around them. Being eighteen years of age does not necessarily mean you can make adult decisions. Besides raising the legal smoking age, doing things like demanding television channels to air more anti-smoking ads, like the truth commercials, or just airing the anti-smoking ads more frequently during prime time hours would decrease the current smoker numbers and prevent future smokers from picking up the dangerously addictive habit and in turn, damaging children's health due to second hand smoke. Education is the best deterrent to preventing smokers to smoke and potential smokers to start. Although we can cut down on children's contact to second hand smoke in and around public buildings and now even in vehicles, there is still the huge problem of the second hand smoke that is inhaled by children in their own home. The National Survey on Environmental Management of Asthma and Children's Exposure to Environmental Tobacco Smoke (NSEMA/CEE) (U. S. Environmental Protection Agency, 2004) has found that 11% of children aged 6 years and under are exposed to ETS in their homes on a regular basis (4 or more days per week) compared to 20% in the 1998 National Health Interview Survey (NHIS) and that parents are responsible for 90% of children's exposure to ETS. Children face a higher risk than adults of the negative effects of secondhand smoke. Not only is a child's body still developing physically, but their breathing rate is faster than that of adults. Adults breathe in and out approximately 14 to 18 times a minute, where newborns can breathe as many as 60 times a minute. Up until a child is about 5 years old, the respiratory rate is quite fast; usually between 20 and 60 breaths per

minute. When the air is tainted with cigarette smoke, young, developing lungs receive a higher concentration of inhaled toxins than do older lungs. 6 To cut down on children involuntarily inhaling second hand smoking in the home, a new law should be passed making it illegal to smoke in your house, apartment, condo, trailer, etc., if there are children living there. Cigarette smoking should only be permitted outdoors on the porch or balcony with the door and windows closed and the person smoking being of no less than forty feet from the entrance, exit, or windows. Harsh fines should be put into action if parents, siblings, family members or even babysitters decide to smoke indoors with children currently living there. With these laws into place we can protect our children and give them a much stronger chance of living a long healthy life. One great law that the Government has implemented in order to reduce the appeal of smoking and the risks of second hand smoke, chiefly dwindling the amount of smokers in the United States, is the taxes on tobacco. In California, due to proposition 10, every pack of cigarettes sold has an automatic eighty-seven cent tax attached to it. California is ranked 30th among all fifty states when it comes to cigarette taxes, where as New Jersey is ranked number one, with a \$2. 57 tax added to each pack sold. The more taxes added to tobacco purchases the more money there will be present for paying for health and smoking-cessation programs. Tobacco products are taxed by the Tobacco Products Surtax, which is currently 46. 7% of the cost of the product. Tobacco products include cigars, unrolled tobacco, snuff, chewing tobacco, and any other product, which contains 50 percent tobacco or more. The California State Board of Equalization determines the annual surtax rate. Proposition 86 would amend the state

constitution by raising the tax on cigarettes in California an additional \$2. 64 per pack above the current cost of about \$4. 00 a pack, effectively raising the cost of a pack of cigarettes to close to \$7. 00. The Board of Equalization is required by state law to increase taxes on other tobacco products in an amount equivalent to any increase in the tax on cigarettes. Prop. 86, therefore, would increase the excise tax on other tobacco products.

Proposition 86 would likely increase excise tax revenues for about \$2. 1 billion annually in 2007-08. 7 Unfortunately proposition 86 did not pass and cigarettes in California only have an eight-seven cent tax on them. Making cigarettes unaffordable is a great way to reduce the number of tobacco consumers however the taxes should be steeper in order to effectively lessen cigarette purchases. If this higher tax would be implemented, there would be fewer and fewer smokers, which makes for lesser and lesser second hand smoke. With all the new rules and regulations enforced; smoke free cars, extending the distance of smoking by entryway, increasing the age to purchase cigarettes, prohibiting smoking in the home with children living there, and the increased taxes on cigarettes, innocent bystanders will remarkably suffer less then they do now by second hand smoke. Ignorance today is causing children to experience asthma, and even die from SIDS. The changes that I have proposed in the laws could help people decide to quit smoking or at the very least be smarter about where, how, and who they smoke around. Though refraining from smoking may not be easy because it is extremely addictive, the best solution to ending second hand smoke is to convince the public to quit. “ If you can’t quit for yourself, quit for your kids. Kids of parents who smoke are more likely to start smoking themselves when

they get older. " If you can't quit, at least don't smoke inside your home or your car or other places that your children will be directly exposed to the smoke. 8 The most important thing is that we keep educating ourselves on smoking safety for us and those around us also, focusing on the risks we are taking every time we decide to smoke a cigarette.