

Scientists call smoking spouse a health risk

By Penny Wright
special writer

SO YOUR spouse or housemate has tried to break the smoking habit, and he/she hasn't succeeded. Where does that put you, a non-smoker?

"In a health-risk situation," say many medical scientists.

The Detroit office of the Southeastern Michigan Lung Association provides plenty of documented evidence. Here's a sampling:

• Studies conducted by a Japanese researcher indicate non-smoking wives of heavy smokers have a higher risk of lung cancer.

• Researchers at the University of North Carolina found infants who are cared for in a household with adult cigarette smokers tended to have more

days of disability and school loss than those who live in non-smoker homes.

MARY ELLEN Mumy of S.E. Michigan Lung Association noted people most susceptible to indoor air pollution in the home are the ones who are home the most — infants, young children, the elderly, pregnant women and those with respiratory problems or a history of coronary disease.

Second cigarette smoke, a combination of combustion gases and particulates, tends to contribute to the chemicals already polluting air in the home.

"Indoor air is often polluted with other contaminants — mold, mildew, sprays, furnace and appliance combustion. Smoking increases the problem," said Mumy.

Homes with poor air circulation and low air-change rates are prime candi-



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dates for air pollution concentrations. Lingering tobacco odors, stale air and moisture build-up on windows indicate a potential problem.

ARE THERE acceptable levels of tobacco smoke in the home? Two environmental health professionals shared their views.

"The real issue is — how do people respond to cigarette smoke?" said Bob Powitz, director of environmental

health at Wayne State University. "People allergic to one part of the smoke will get reactions. These individual responses are usually far below any published levels of safety."

Dave Byrd, of Testing Engineers and Consultants in Troy, acknowledged there are detection devices homeowners could use to measure levels of carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide and formaldehyde (also given off by tobacco smoke).

"Most of the standards are pegged to cancer-causing levels. They don't take into consideration other more subtle effects as behavior changes and nausea."

According to Byrd, one of the best ways to cope with indoor air contamination is to move the air. "Mechanical ways of moving the air are the best," said Byrd. "There are also devices on the market that move the house air through a medium and remove the

chemicals from the air. These are effective."

BOB POWITZ has his own formula for keeping the air in his home fresh.

"First, nobody smokes in my house," said Powitz. "We also make an effort to avoid using aerosols, dangerous chemicals, and items that could formaldehyde."

Powitz said he is allergic to formaldehyde and therefore reacts to cigarette smoke. "I get the same response

when I walk into Hudson's and the new season's fashions are just out — the clothes contain formaldehyde."

Powitz recommended homeowners facing air pollution problems look into devices that increase the air changes in the home.

"We went a little crazy with energy consciousness and created what's called 'tight building syndrome,'" said Powitz. "When we reduce the normal infiltration rate in the home, we could get a large build-up of pollutants."

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