

Ban Cigarette Smoking

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Have you ever watched Hollywood movies of the 1940s and 50s in which the stars of the film spent most of their time lighting one another's cigarettes? Think of Humphrey Bogart and Lauren Bacall in the 1944 production of *To Have and Have Not*. More than fifteen scenes centre on cigarettes. Smoking was more than recreation and enjoyment: it was what the stars did, and they were considered cool. However, research begun in the late 1950s began to show the damage that smoking could do to human health, and suddenly, the movies took a different turn. The habit began to be viewed as being socially unacceptable, even harmful. Although smoking rates have declined in the adult Canadian population over the past 20 years, rates for youths have, in fact, increased. Younger people are now smoking, but tobacco companies carry on denying the facts and manipulating their unsuspecting audiences to the real harm smoking can do. Cigarette smoking should be completely banned from all parts of Canada for any citizen, no matter what age.

Supporters of the tobacco industry claim that cigarette smoking is not as harmful as it is made out to be. Groups like Forces Canada (2008) declare that the damage done by second-hand smoke is completely unfounded, yet Health Canada reports, based on scientific studies, continue to warn Canadians about the dangers of second-hand smoke, particularly among children living with smokers (para.8). In addition, supporters state the tobacco industry is a major corporate sponsor. Companies such as Philip Morris, Rothmans, and JTI Macdonald Corp. have been long-term major contributors to sports like figure skating and skiing. Many claim that without this corporate support several world-class events would not be financially possible. Anti-smoking activists, on the other hand, maintain that smoking is a harmful activity that ought not to be promoted by athletes, professional or amateur. They say athletes are models for Canadian youth,

and having tobacco companies promote their athletic heroes is akin to suggesting that the athletes are also in favour of smoking. Finally, opponents of anti-smoking bans maintain that removing their right to smoke in public places removes a personal right and freedom. The author of "The history of tobacco regulation: Forward to past" (2011) decries authoritative intervention and suggests "for two decades, a significant amount of political influence has been exercised throughout both Canada and the United States in support of increased regulation" (p. 3). However, these groups do not take the same stance when it comes to other issues of social importance in which governments do "interfere"—international trade, military involvement, and drug regulations. Since interest groups always act for their own benefit, they will not be in favour of anti-smoking campaigns: it becomes more a matter of diminishing profits rather than individuals' rights. For these reasons, it is clear that most opposition to the banning of cigarette smoking stems from self-interest rather than from a commitment to societal good.

Smoking cigarettes damages human health. Individual smokers can expect to suffer terrible diseases like lung cancer brought on by inhaling cigarettes or to die early. Each year approximately 45 000 Canadians will die as a result of cigarette smoking (International Development Research Centre, n.d.). According to the experts, "Cigarette smoke contains more than 4000 chemicals. At least 43 of these have been identified as carcinogenic in humans or animals, and others have been identified as toxic, so it is no surprise that smoking is so harmful" (International Development Research Centre, n.d., para.8). Furthermore, second-hand smoke is harmful. One study suggests that breathing in second-hand cigarette smoke is actually more destructive than taking in mainstream smoke because second-hand smoke contains higher levels of carcinogens produced at lower temperatures ("Tobacco Smoke," 2012). Pregnant women run the risk of damage to their unborn.

Nonsmokers are harmed by second-hand smoke, technically known as environmental tobacco smoke (ETS) but sometimes referred to as passive smoking or involuntary smoking. ETS includes both the smoke emitted from the lit end of the cigarette and the mainstream smoke exhaled by a smoker. ETS can cause fatal lung cancer in otherwise healthy nonsmokers and has a particularly harmful impact on children's respiratory systems. (International Development Research Centre, n.d., para.10)

Cigarette smoking should be outlawed because it is so costly. First, cigarette smoking is expensive on a social level. The national health care system shoulders the main burden when it comes to paying for the damaged health of cigarette smokers. According to the Aboriginal Youth Network Canada (2009) website, "Smokers cost society about \$15 billion while contributing roughly \$7.8 billion in taxes" (para.2). The high price of fire insurance and the loss of life in fires started by careless smokers are two other significant issues that affect people and communities. For example, a study conducted by Aligne and Stoddard (2007) of the University of Wisconsin declared that "more young children are killed by parental smoking than by all unintentional injuries combined" (p. 652). Besides that expense, there is the cost to the individual smoker. The cost of smoking in 2005 is estimated to be \$3000 per year for the average smoker, \$6000 for two parents who smoke. Over five years, smoking amounts to \$30 000—money that could have been spent on something tangible to improve the quality of family life. Of course, damage done to an individual's health because of cigarette smoking is beyond counting dollars. Besides life-threatening illnesses like cancer, heart disease, and emphysema—all well-documented outcomes of long-term cigarette smoking on human health by countless studies over the past two decades—individuals should consider what sustained smoking does to personal appearance. First, it causes premature aging of the skin ("Gender and Tobacco", n.d.). Next, the smoke itself

yellow teeth and fingers, ruins clothes, and permeates the hair. Also on a personal level, smokers have to deal with the interiors of homes and apartments that require repainting, with furniture that stinks and with damage due to cigarette burns.

Other individuals become the victims of cigarettes. Workers who do not wish to work in a smoke-filled environment have little or no control over their own health. They are fighting back to regain some of that control and with some support from some powerful friends. In January 1, 2000, for instance, the Workers' Compensation Board brought in legislation in British Columbia to ban smoking in the workplace in an attempt to protect workers from the effects of second-hand smoke.

Smoking is an anti-social activity, so it should be legislated as an immoral act. It is irresponsible and immoral to continue to expose innocents like children to the terrible hazards of second-hand smoke. Smoking and drinking are often a paired activity, endangering others in apartment buildings or condominium developments if an intoxicated person passes out with a lit cigarette. Furthermore, some women were encouraged to use cigarettes to suppress their appetites. At the same time, smoking was seen as a way women could assert their independence ("Gender and Tobacco," n.d.). Encouraging smoking amongst women is tantamount to attacking the social system. Smoking during pregnancy increases the risk of complications, low birth weight, miscarriages, stillbirths, premature births, bleeding during pregnancy, and sudden infant death syndrome. Smoking has been linked to lowered immunity, early menopause, reduced fertility, and peptic ulcers (International Development Research Centre, n.d.). Tobacco is harmful to the environment.

In addition to the damage from forest fires, the outdoors has to deal with about 2 billion empty cigarette packages annually, several billion plastic and metallic foil overwraps (used to

keep the product fresh), and about 50 billion discarded cigarette butts. The butts are often made with cellulose acetate tow, a substance with poor biodegradability. A vast number of trees are cut down each year to produce cigarette paper, packages, cartons, shipping boxes, matches, and matchbooks (International Development Research Centre, n.d.).

Banning cigarette smoking is the only sensible and moral thing to do. The cost to individuals, communities, and social systems continues to rise due to tobacco abuse. Without more control, medical costs will continue to rise and more people will become sick or die. According to one writer, "Nothing can place a value on the pain and suffering caused by disease, the grief of losing a friend or loved one, or the financial crisis created by the death of a family's wage earner" (International Development Research Centre, n.d., para.13). Moreover, the Government of Canada has the moral obligation to protect the rights of its citizens by assuring fresh water, food, and air. Allowing the continuance of smoking abrogates those responsibilities and instead, places commerce before the health and happiness of a nation's citizenry. Surprisingly, many people continue to deny the facts about smoking. However, rather than engage in a discussion over whose rights should take precedence in the matter, both the federal and provincial governments need to step up and take responsibility for protecting citizens' health. Of all smokers who die prematurely, half will die before age 70 and lose an average of 23 years of life. The half who die after age 70 lose an average of 8 years of life (International Development Research Centre, n.d.).

Smoking must be banned if Canadian citizens are to enjoy a system of health care that can be supported, an atmosphere that is healthful, not toxic, a cost of living that is tenable, and a society that respects an individual's right to be healthy. The Government of Canada, the provincial governments, municipalities, and citizen and community groups must be held

accountable before the financial and medical support systems become overburdened and transformed to such a degree that no one except a few corporations benefit.

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