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Alfresco smoke risk to health

Air quality tests at Perth cafes and pubs show that when two or more people are smoking in alfresco areas, non-smokers are exposed to enough second hand smoke to put them at risk of respiratory symptoms.

The research, conducted by Curtin University's Julia Stafford and Professor Mike Daube, and The University of Western Australia's Dr Peter Franklin, has been published in a paper entitled *Second hand smoke in alfresco areas* in the August edition of the *Health Promotion Journal of Australia*.

Curtin Professor of Health Policy, Mike Daube, said the research found that even in outdoor well-ventilated areas, second hand smoke levels could be high enough to be a health risk to others nearby.

The researchers worked with the Australian Council on Smoking and Health (ACOSH) to test the air quality in 28 cafes and pubs in Perth, Melville, Nedlands, Subiaco, Swan, Stirling, Victoria Park and Mandurah, using a particle monitor (SidePak). The SidePak measures microscopic air pollutants of the size of tobacco smoke particles.

"The tests found that tobacco smoke particle concentrations significantly increased from 3.98 micrograms per cubic metre ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) of air for periods when no one was smoking to 14.25 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$ of air when there was at least one smoker," Professor Daube said.

"The amount of second hand smoke detected increased with the number of people smoking. Average concentrations for none, one and two or more smokers were 3.98, 10.59 and 17.00 $\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$.

"The differences remained significant after controlling for other factors including wind level, outdoor cover, the average number of patrons, street type and road traffic."

Curtin researcher, Julia Stafford said most testing was not done during the venue's busiest trading times, meaning the amount of second hand smoke present was likely to be even greater during peak periods when more smokers were present.

"Exposure to second hand smoke is an established health hazard and the United States Surgeon General has concluded that scientific evidence indicates there is no risk-free level of exposure to second hand smoke," Ms Stafford said.

"The findings support the alfresco smoking restrictions which form part of the Tobacco Products Control Amendment Act 2009, due to come into force on 22 September 2010.

"This research supports smoking bans in areas where people may spend extended periods of time, such as outdoor eating and drinking venues.

"While the new regulations on alfresco smoking are an important step forward, we urge all venues to go 100 per cent smoke free to protect the health of their staff and customers."

Professor Daube said many non-smokers around Australia were still exposed to second hand smoke in alfresco areas of hospitality venues.

“Broad definitions of ‘enclosed’ public places, like those in NSW for example that allow smoking in spaces where 25 per cent of its total ceiling and wall areas are exposed to the outside, provide loopholes for venue owners to weaken the intention of smoking bans,” he said.

“Governments should be encouraged to legislate further against smoking in alfresco eating and drinking areas on the basis of the real health risks of second hand smoke exposure.”

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