



Damage from Cigarette Smoke Residue: The Cost of Allowing Smoking in Multi-Housing

Secondhand smoke can be very damaging—damaging to residents health and the building’s integrity. Adopting a smoke-free policy helps to protect both.

How can secondhand smoke damage property?

Smoking in an apartment unit or condo residence can cause *significant* property damage. When turning over a smoked-in unit, property managers encounter a sticky residue that secondhand smoke leaves behind. This residue occurs because some particles in secondhand smoke, particularly those in nicotine, stick to surfaces and attract other particles, dirt, dust, and grime.¹ This residue usually coats the walls and other surfaces in a yellow or brown color. Damage also often includes a stale odor in porous surfaces like carpets, and burn marks in carpets, countertops, and other surfaces caused by dropped cigarette butts or ash.



Secondhand smoke residue is obvious after pictures are removed.

How much can secondhand smoke damage cost?

Because of the residue and odor left behind, property managers have reported that it often costs two to three times more to clean up and turnover a unit that has been smoked in compared to a smoke-free unit.² In buildings without smoke-free policies, these costs can add up quickly and cause financial strain for the property owner. In heavily smoked-in units, items like flooring, countertops and appliances need to be replaced in addition to extra coats of paint and general cleaning costs. The cost analysis below compares the cost of turning over a smoked– in unit to a smoke-free unit.

	Non-Smoking	Light Smoking	Heavy Smoking
General Cleaning	\$240	\$500	\$720
Paint	\$170	\$225	\$480
Flooring	\$50	\$950	\$1,425
Appliances	\$60	\$75	\$490
Bathroom	\$40	\$60	\$400
total	\$560	\$1,810	\$3,515

Data reflects surveys from housing authorities and subsidized housing facilities in New England. Collected and reported by Smoke-Free Housing New England, 2009. This information is courtesy of the National Center of Healthy Housing.



Cigarette burn in carpet.

For condo and townhome owners, secondhand smoke residue can harm your resale value; 88% of Ontario real estate agents reported that it’s more difficult to sell a home that has been smoked in, and that the value of your home can decrease by 29%.³

How Does Cigarette Smoke Residue Damage Health?

While some particles in secondhand smoke stick to and stay on top of surfaces, many of the gases in secondhand smoke absorb *into* the surfaces. As those chemicals break down over time, the chemicals “off gas” or desorb back into the air, which is known as ‘Thirdhand Smoke.’ This means that people are exposed to the same chemicals found in secondhand smoke long after the smoking activity has stopped.

What is the bottom line?

Bottom line: a smoke-free policy helps the bottom line. It saves property owners and apartment managers the elevated turnover costs involved with turning over smoked-in units.



Secondhand smoke came through a wall vent and left residue behind.

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References

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3. Pfizer Canada Inc. “Up In Smoke: Smoking in the Home can Lower the Resale Value by Tens of Thousands.” *The Wall Street Journal*. <http://online.wsj.com/article/PR-CO-20130416-906473.html> Web. Oct. 29 2013.

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