

Change in Arkansas Law Protects More Kids from Secondhand Smoke

During the recent legislative session, Arkansas lawmakers amended the Arkansas Protection from Secondhand Smoke for Children Act of 2006. This law previously made it a primary offense to smoke in a vehicle with children under 6 and weighing less than 60 pounds present. The new law protects even more children by raising the age to cover children under 14 and eliminating the weight restriction.

The new law, now called Act 811 of 2011, allows Arkansas law enforcement to pull over drivers seen smoking in a car with a child under 14 and issue a ticket, which carries a \$25 fine. First-time violators of the law can avoid the \$25 fine by proving enrollment in a program to quit smoking. Arkansas was the first state in the country to implement this kind of law. Other states including California, Louisiana and Maine and municipalities such as Rockland County in New York and Keyport in New Jersey have adopted similar and stronger laws protecting children under 12 to 18 years of age, and they have established penalties up to \$2,000 per violation.

Secondhand smoke poses serious risks to children, and Arkansas' law enforcement community plays an important role in keeping our state's children safe and healthy. Children who are exposed to secondhand smoke are at an increased risk for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, lower respiratory infections, middle ear disease, more severe asthma, respiratory symptoms and slowed lung growth. Children are especially vulnerable to the health effects of secondhand smoke because their respiratory, immune and nervous systems are still developing.

"There is no doubt secondhand smoke is incredibly dangerous, especially to children, and there is no safe level of exposure," said Dr. Paul Halverson, Director and State Health Officer of the Arkansas Department of Health. "Our state has a responsibility to protect kids while they are most vulnerable – when involuntarily confined to a vehicle with a smoker. And we are grateful for the service of those who help enforce this important law."

According to the California Environmental Health Protection Agency, the concentration of secondhand smoke in cars can exceed that in homes and bars by 10 to 100 times. Even with open windows, smoke can stay trapped in the car, exposing children to high levels of particulate pollution. The confined space of a car allows levels from a single burning cigarette to build to a toxic level in a short period of time; hazardous levels of this degree typically only occur near an outdoor forest fire!

In Arkansas in 2010, more than 36 percent of middle school students and 48 percent of high school students reported riding in a car in the past seven days with someone who smoked one or more cigarettes. According to the 2008 Adult Tobacco Survey, 73 percent of Arkansas adults would support an even stronger

law that protects all children under 18 from exposure to secondhand smoke in a car.

Act 811 of 2011 is a step in the right direction to protect more of Arkansas' children from secondhand smoke and make cars safe, healthy environments for everyone. The law takes effect July 27, 2011.

For more information about Act 811 of 2011, call the Arkansas Tobacco Prevention and Cessation Program at (501) 661-2953, or to quit smoking call the Arkansas Tobacco Quitline at 1-800-QUIT-NOW.