
TENANTS

How to Minimize the Problem of Second-Hand Smoke

It is important you take all reasonable steps available to reduce the amount of smoke entering your unit. Based on a review of dispute resolution decisions, Adjudicators consider whether tenants have attempted to minimize the problem themselves before applying to the Residential Tenancy Branch. This could include such actions as attempting to seal up cracks and gaps where the smoke is coming in, speaking or negotiating with the smoking neighbour, or talking to your landlord, to name just a few. Here are some steps you might consider:

Talk to your neighbours

- If you feel comfortable, consider talking to your smoking neighbour. He or she might not realize that the smoke is a problem for you. Try to focus on solutions such as asking the neighbour to smoke outside, smoke in another area, close doors or windows, or seal the source of the smoke.
- Seek support from other neighbours in the building. They might be experiencing the same problem, and may be willing to talk to the landlord with you.
- Consider starting a petition that the building be designated as smoke-free. While the smoke may not personally affect others, your neighbours may be sympathetic and lend their support. The majority of renters in BC would prefer a smoke-free building. (See Tools & Resources for sample tenant petition).

Seal your Unit to reduce air transfer

- Use caulk or spray-in foam around plumbing, electrical outlets, cracks and gaps
- Close windows and doors
- Weather-strip doors and windows where possible
- Cover or block heating/cooling grilles.

For more information, read [Solving Odour Transfer Problems in Your Apartment](#), published by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation.

Investigate the Ventilation

The Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation states that most apartment buildings built since the mid-1960s have corridor ventilation systems in place. These systems are designed to deliver outside air into corridors to maintain positive pressure. Air is continuously pushed under doors, thereby preventing odours from escaping individual units and leaking into the corridors and neighbouring apartments. Older buildings rely on air coming in through cracks and gaps for ventilation. In addition, many apartments have exhaust systems to ventilate the bathrooms and kitchens, with fans either right in individual units or located centrally elsewhere in the building.

- If second-hand smoke is entering your apartment from under the front door, and you suspect that it originated in another private unit, ask the landlord to check the corridor ventilation system to ensure that it is operating properly. Sometimes such systems operate intermittently on a timer, and it may be that the schedule needs to be adjusted to increase the amount of fresh air entering the building.
- If second-hand smoke is seeping into your unit from a bathroom or kitchen fan, try the tissue test. Turn on your kitchen or bathroom fan and hold a tissue to the grille. The fan should be able to hold the tissue firmly in place. If it doesn't, or actually blows instead of sucks, talk to the landlord about having the unit cleaned, repaired or replaced.
- Another possible solution is to investigate having your apartment pressurized to prevent air (and second-hand smoke) leaking in from other units by having a professional install a HEPA-filtered (High Efficiency Particulate Air) heat recovery ventilation system.
 - The idea is to create positive indoor air pressure by using a fan to force fresh air into your unit, thus preventing smoke infiltration. For this to work you will have to keep your windows closed and your windows and doors will need to be well sealed.
 - However, there are a couple of drawbacks to this option, the first being expense. Also, positive pressure may cause condensation problems depending on the climate where you live and the ventilation of your unit. Before considering this solution, check your lease or talk to the superintendent or landlord to see if it is permitted.

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- Many high-rise apartment buildings have pressurization systems in the corridors, and pressuring your own unit may interfere with the ventilation system of your building. Then consult with a ventilation expert to ensure that the installation and operation of the system complies with the requirements of the building code.

It is important to note that while improved ventilation can remove the odour of tobacco smoke and the source of eye and throat irritation, no ventilation system is capable of reducing exposure to the many toxic chemicals in second-hand smoke to an acceptable level.