Tobacco Smoking Injury Dangers

Cigarette smoking kills an estimated 443,000 people, roughly 1 out of every 5 deaths, every year in the United States. Each year, smoking kills more people than alcohol, AIDS, car accidents, illegal drugs, murders, and suicides combined. From these figures, roughly 38,000 people die each year from secondhand smoke -- tobacco smoke that has been exhaled by smokers and inhaled involuntarily or passively by other people.

Smoking and chewing tobacco is the single most preventable cause of disease, disability and death in the U.S., according to the U.S. Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Smoking is so dangerous that federal law requires warnings on every package of cigarettes, cigars, and chewing tobacco. These different warnings are clear and direct about smoking and tobacco dangers:

• Smoking Causes Lung Cancer, Heart Disease, Emphysema, and May Complicate Pregnancy.
• Smoking By Pregnant Women May Result in Fetal Injury, Premature Birth, And Low Birth Weight.
• Cigarette Smoke Contains Carbon Monoxide.
• Cigar Smoking Can Cause Cancers Of The Mouth And Throat, Even If You Do Not Inhale.
• Tobacco Smoke Increases The Risk Of Lung Cancer And Heart Disease, Even In Nonsmokers.
• Smokeless Tobacco May Cause Gum Disease And Tooth Loss.
• Smokeless Tobacco May Cause Mouth Cancer.

Smoking Deaths and Injuries: The Numbers

Smoking harms nearly every organ in the body, but it wreaks particular havoc on the lungs and heart. Smoking can cause chronic lung disease, and has been attributed to cause cancer of the lungs, larynx, esophagus, mouth, bladder, cervix, pancreas, and kidneys.

Studies of tobacco’s effects on health also show:

• 129,000 people die each year, on average, from lung cancer caused by smoking.
• 126,000 people die each year from congestive heart failure and coronary artery disease caused by cigarette smoking.
• 90,000 people die from chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD) caused by smoking each year. The two most common forms of COPD are emphysema and chronic obstructive bronchitis.

According to NIH, cigarette smoking is the leading cause of COPD, a disease that affects one’s ability to breathe, getting progressively worse over time. Cigarette smokers and victims of second hand smoke who suffer from COPD breathe less air because smoking damaged the air sacs in their lungs, clogged their airways, and/or

• Smokes is also responsible for more than 35,000 deaths from other cancers each year, nearly 16,000 annual stroke-related death, and 44,000 deaths from other causes attributable to smoking.

Cigarettes are not the only form of tobacco that can kill or injure you. Cigar smoking and chewing tobacco are also associated with an increased risk of death from several highly fatal cancers, including oral, throat and esophageal cancer.

The Dangerously High Medical Costs of Smoking Related Injuries

The financial cost for treating smoking-related injuries and ongoing healthcare costs for treating tobacco-related injuries and conditions are staggering. Many smoking-related illnesses like lung cancer are fatal, and only get progressively worse over time. The costs associated with getting treatment, medication, and chronic care can be an enormous financial burden for smokers and their families.
Physical injury is not the only one aspect of Smoking-related trauma. The mental traumas that smoking victims experience from smoking-induced cancers can also be significant.

The estimated annual public and private financial cost from smoking related health care expenses is $96 billion. Additional estimated annual costs include:

- $4.98 billion for second-hand smoke-related health care costs, including expenditures for babies and children whose mothers either smoked, or were exposed to smoking.
- $97 billion in lost productivity costs for employers due to smoking-related illnesses, including sick days and disability.
- $2.6 billion paid via Social Security to children who have lost at least one parent due to smoking.
- $619 per American taxpayer household towards government expenditures for smoking-caused healthcare costs and related spending.

Unless smoking rates decline, more than 6 million children under 18 who are alive today will be dead from smoking-related problems in the future. Every day, roughly 1,000 children under 18 years-old become new, regular smokers.

When five big tobacco companies gave the U.S. Dept. of Health and Human Services a list of 599 cigarette additives in 1994, it was learned that forty-three (43) known carcinogens are in cigarette smoke, whether inhaled by smokers or passively by nearby non-smokers.

Some ingredients in cigarettes, like nicotine, can be addictive, making it hard to quit smoking. Many people who have been smokers for years or decades have claimed that tobacco companies misled them into thinking that cigarettes were safe, or not harmful to one's health.

A new federal law, the Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act, requires tobacco companies to give the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) a detailed list of all the ingredients in their tobacco products by June 22, 2010. This includes all single chemical ingredients (e.g., hydrogen cyanide and ammonia), tobacco leaves, and complex purchased ingredients (e.g., flavor extracts, like chocolate and spices).

**Smoking on the Job and Workers Compensation**

If you are a non-smoker and have become sick because of environmental tobacco smoke at work, you may be entitled to Workers' Compensation benefits.

An increasing number of employees are being awarded Workers' Compensation benefits if they can prove that environmental tobacco smoke in their workplace caused medical problems, or worsened any pre-existing medical conditions they already had.

**Smoking Injuries and Your Legal Rights**

If you or a loved one experienced smoking-related injuries, you may be entitled to compensation for current and future expenses, in addition to special legal damages.

Some of the legal factors that an attorney can review with you include:

- Whether you and your loved ones may be entitled to compensation for current and future medical and treatment expenses;
- If you and your loved ones can recover lost wages from work, and other out-of-pocket expenses stemming from smoking-related injuries; and
- Whether smoking injuries may entitle you and your loved ones to recover damages for pain and suffering.

**Getting Legal Help for Tobacco and Cigarette Smoking Injuries**

Scores of product liability, wrongful death, and personal injury lawsuits were filed by smokers and their families against tobacco companies and cigarette makers over the last three decades.

If you or a loved one has suffered an illness or injury that might be from smoking cigarettes or chewing tobacco, you should first contact your doctor or other healthcare professional.

You may also wish to meet with an experienced attorney to discuss your legal options and any potential rights to a legal remedy for any harm caused from smoking or chewing tobacco.

- Go here to learn more about what attorneys do in defective and dangerous products cases.
- To find an experienced attorney, use the "Find a Lawyer" tool on this page, or click here.

**Related Resources:**

- The National Cancer Institute
- U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
- U.S. Department of Justice
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