

10 Smokiest U.S. Cities —and 10 Most Smoke-Free, Too

By Megan Johnson

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US News and World Report

On the heels of Monday's Supreme Court decision that even "light" cigarettes pose severe health risks and that smokers can sue tobacco companies for advertising otherwise, U.S. News brings you a list of metropolitan areas where smoking rates remain high.

If you're a nonsmoker living in a smoky city, you've got reason to be concerned about secondhand smoke!

Smokiest Metro Areas Smoking Rate*

1. Huntington, W.Va.	34.4 percent
2. Kingsport-Bristol, Tenn.	30.5 percent
3. Gulfport-Biloxi, Miss.	28.8 percent
4. Greensboro, N.C.	28.3 percent
5. Mobile, Ala.	26.9 percent
6. Casper, Wyo.	26.8 percent
7. Chattanooga, Tenn.	26.5 percent
7. Wilmington, N.C.	26.5 percent
9. Tulsa, Okla.	26.0 percent
10. Hickory, N.C.	25.9 percent

*Percentage of residents who are smokers

Most Smoke-Free Metro Areas Nonsmoking Rate**

1. Provo-Orem, Utah	93.5 percent
2. Bethesda-Gaithersburg-Frederick, Md.	89.5 percent
3. Ogden, Utah	89.4 percent
4. Brownsville, Texas	88.2 percent
5. Durham, N.C.	88.0 percent
6. Idaho Falls, Idaho	87.7 percent
7. San Francisco	87.5 percent
8. Burlington, Vt.	87.2 percent
9. Bridgeport-Stamford-Norwalk, Conn.	86.9 percent
10. Portland, Ore.	86.5 percent

**Percentage of residents who are nonsmokers

North Carolina cities shouldn't be on this top 10 list

Three changes would help get metro areas out of 'smokiest' rankings.

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Charlotte Observer

From Dr. Leah Devlin of the N.C. Department of Health and Human Services:

On Dec. 16, U.S. News & World Report ranked the nation's top 10 smokiest metropolitan areas. Three North Carolina cities made the list. No state besides North Carolina had more than two cities on the list. As North Carolina's State Health Director, I want to join local health directors and other public health leaders across the state in urging North Carolina to renew its commitment to make this state a healthy place to live, work and play.

The report, which is based on the proportion of smokers in each area's population, ranks Greensboro 4th, Wilmington 7th and Hickory 10th. Huntington, W.Va., Kingsport-Bristol, Tenn. and Gulfport-Biloxi, Miss. are listed as numbers one, two and three, respectively.

This is one list we don't want to be on. Tobacco use is not only the leading preventable cause of death and disability in our state, but is also a huge contributor to health-care costs. Smoking costs North Carolinians \$2.46 billion annually in medical costs alone, including \$769 million per year to the N.C. Medicaid program. Smokers, on average, lose 14 years of life over nonsmokers. In addition, the negative health effects on nonsmokers from environmental exposure to tobacco smoke are well documented.

But we can change all of this. It is great that Durham appeared on the magazine's companion list of "Most Smoke-Free Metro Areas," ranking 5th in the nation, with 88 percent of residents being nonsmokers. This is a reflection of leadership in Durham, and of the high education levels that are linked to lower smoking rates.

And North Carolina has made great strides in tobacco control, especially with the investment of Health and Wellness Trust Fund resources in reducing teen smoking rates and bringing about 100 percent tobacco-free school policies. Almost all hospitals are now tobacco-free. The N.C. General Assembly made state government buildings smoke-free, and allowed local governments statewide to adopt smoke-free workplaces to protect the health of their workers. Yet, many North Carolinians continue to be exposed to secondhand smoke at work.

The "Smokiest City" rankings highlight the need for our state to make three changes that have been proven to work:

First, help more tobacco users quit, by using the N.C. Tobacco Use Quitline at 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669). It is a free, confidential telephone service, proven to be effective in helping tobacco users quit.

Second, all worksites and public places should be smoke-free. The 2006 Report of the U.S. Surgeon General makes it clear that secondhand smoke is a serious health hazard that causes early death and disease in nonsmokers.

Third, increase the state's cigarette tax to the national average. With a cigarette tax of 35 cents per pack, North Carolina ranks 45th lowest among the 50 states. The current national average now stands at \$1.19 per pack. Higher cigarette taxes have been shown nationwide to reduce smoking and raise needed revenue.

Action is needed so that all N.C. residents have an opportunity for a healthier, longer life.