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Change in Arkansas Law Protects More Kids from Secondhand Smoke

CITY, Ark. (Month Day, Year) – Effective July 27, an amended Arkansas law will protect 78 percent of Arkansas children from secondhand smoke in vehicles – a significant increase from the law's previous 34 percent protected. Act 811 of 2011 makes it a primary offense to smoke in a vehicle with children under 14, and violators can be pulled over and ticketed.

The Arkansas Protection from Secondhand Smoke for Children Act of 2006, also known as Act 13, previously protected children under 6 and weighing less than 60 pounds. During the 88th General Assembly, Sen. Percy Malone (D-Arkadelphia) filed a bill to increase the age of protection, and after passing the Arkansas Senate and House of Representatives, Governor Mike Beebe signed the bill into law on March 30.

"The concentration of secondhand smoke in vehicles can exceed that in homes and bars by 10 to 100 times due to their confined space," said [Name, title]. "Children's developing respiratory, immune and nervous systems are especially vulnerable to the dangerous health effects of secondhand smoke, and we are thrilled this law will protect more of them."

Children exposed to secondhand smoke are at an increased risk for Sudden Infant Death Syndrome, lower respiratory infections, middle ear disease, more severe asthma and slowed lung growth. Cigarette smoke contains hundreds of toxic chemicals – at least 69 of which cause cancer, and each year, 470 Arkansans die from secondhand smoke.

Even with open windows, smoke can stay trapped in a car, exposing children to high levels of particulate pollution. In a short time, pollution levels from a single burning cigarette can build to a hazard level equivalent to the vicinity of an outdoor forest fire. According to the 2008 Adult Tobacco Survey, 73 percent of Arkansas adults would support a stronger law that protects all children under 18 from exposure to secondhand smoke in vehicles.

For more information, 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.

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