

Smoking and natural disasters: Christchurch residents increase tobacco consumption post-earthquake

September 4 2012

The prevalence of smoking in Christchurch, New Zealand, increased following the 2010 earthquake, according to a new study.

The results of the study will be presented today (4 September 2012) at the European Respiratory Society's Annual Congress in Vienna.

The 7.1-[magnitude](#) Christchurch earthquake, and subsequent [aftershocks](#), have caused a huge amount of damage and dramatically changed the social, working and living conditions for residents in the city.

To investigate the effects of the disaster on smoking levels, researchers from the Canterbury District Health Board, New Zealand, carried out interviews with 1,001 residents 15 months after the first earthquake. Participants were asked about their smoking habits before and after the earthquake.

The results showed that prior to the earthquake in August 2010, 319 people were not smoking at this time. Of this group, 76 people had smoked at least once after the earthquake, with 29 people from this group having more than 100 cigarettes since September 2010.

Of the 273 people who were smoking in August 2010, 93 had increased their consumption of tobacco. 53 people in this group attributed this increase to the earthquake and the subsequent changes in lifestyle.

Professor Lutz Beckert, from the Canterbury District Health Board, said: "Increased levels of smoking were found in Christchurch residents after the earthquake. 28% of people who were not smoking prior to the earthquake picked up the habit following the quakes. This suggests that exposure to trauma, such as a natural disaster, can prompt people to start smoking as they believe it is a valid way to deal with their anxiety over their experiences and coping for changes in lifestyle.

"It is important for [healthcare professionals](#) to be aware of this increased risk in the aftermath of a disaster, such as the Christchurch [earthquake](#), so that they can be ready to provide the necessary support to residents before they turn to cigarettes."

Provided by European Lung Foundation

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