

Massachusetts' fire-safe cigarette law appears to decrease likelihood of residential fires

February 13 2014

A six-year-old Massachusetts law requiring that only "fire-safe" cigarettes (FSCs) be sold in the state appears to decrease the likelihood of unintentional residential fires caused by cigarettes by 28%, according to a new study by Harvard School of Public Health (HSPH) researchers.

The study will appear online February 13, 2014 in the *American Journal of Public Health*.

"This study is the first rigorous population-based study to evaluate the effectiveness of the fire-safe cigarette standards, and shows that science-based tobacco product regulation can protect the public health," said lead author Hillel Alpert, research scientist at the Center for Global Tobacco Control at HSPH.

Burning [cigarettes](#) left smoldering on a bed, furniture, or other flammable material are a leading cause of residential fires in the United States, generating hundreds of millions of dollars each year in property damage, health care costs, lost productivity, death, and injuries. Young children, seniors, African Americans, Native Americans, the poor, people living in rural areas or in substandard housing, and firefighters are especially at risk.

To evaluate the effectiveness of Massachusetts' Fire Safe Cigarette Law, the researchers analyzed seven years of data from 2004 to 2010 on

accidental residential fires, including 1,629 caused by cigarettes. The information was reported to the Massachusetts Fire Incident Reporting System, a system maintained by the Massachusetts Department of Fire Services.

The results appear to show that the likelihood of unintentional residential fires caused by cigarettes decreased by 28% after the Massachusetts law was enacted in 2008. The largest reductions were among cigarette fires in which human factors, such as falling asleep while smoking, were involved, and among fires that were ignited on materials, which are the scenarios for which the standard was developed.

"This study confirms that the fire standard compliant (FSC) cigarette law has reduced the number of fires from cigarettes started by igniting furniture and bedding as it was designed to do," said Massachusetts Fire Marshal Stephen Coan.

"We now have the science to support that all tobacco companies throughout the world should voluntarily make their cigarettes less likely to ignite fires," said Gregory Connolly, professor of the practice of [public health](#) and director of the HSPH Center for Global Tobacco Control.

More information: "Effectiveness of the Cigarette Ignition Propensity Standard in Preventing Unintentional Residential Fires in Massachusetts," Hillel R. Alpert, David Christiani, E. John Orav, Douglas W. Dockery, Gregory N. Connolly, *American Journal of Public Health*, online February 13, 2014.

Provided by Harvard School of Public Health

Citation: Massachusetts' fire-safe cigarette law appears to decrease likelihood of residential fires (2014, February 13) retrieved 2 May 2024 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2014-02-massachusetts-fire-safe-cigarette-law-decrease.html>

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