

Study finds high level of smoking around others at bus stops

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A study of bus stops in the Wellington Region has identified high levels of smoking around other people and high levels of butt littering.

The University of Otago Wellington study shows that people who light up while waiting for the bus usually smoke close to other people who are also waiting there – including in the same enclosed bus shelters.

While observing 112 [cigarettes](#) being smoked at [bus stops](#) in Wellington and Lower Hutt during September and October last year, researchers found [smokers](#) smoked around others 95% of the time. For bus stops with bus shelters, a third of the cigarettes smoked were in a bus shelter with others present – a situation where high levels of secondhand smoke can be present.

Secondhand smoke exposure is an important part of the risk posed by tobacco use globally, with part of the problem arising from smoking in transportation settings such as bus stops and train station platforms, says study lead author Associate Professor Nick Wilson.

Smoking also often occurred with young people around, which has the added issue of making smoking appear normal to those who are at risk of becoming smokers, says Wilson.

"Our finding that over half the smoking was around young people is important, particularly given the Government's goal of a smokefree nation by 2025 and evidence that shows the importance of denormalising

smoking for youth as part of achieving that goal."

Smoking-related litter was also a problem identified in the study. A large majority of the observed smoking events resulted in cigarette butts being littered (84%), and in all cases there were rubbish bins nearby. Most cigarette butts were not extinguished (65%), and 4% were discarded into vegetation, which may be relevant to fire risk in some situations.

Study co-author Associate Professor George Thomson says one explanation of this behaviour is that most smokers do not see butts as litter.

"But butts are both litter and also toxic waste, and have implications for damaging fish life in New Zealand waterways and harbours since they can be washed into these waterways through storm-water drains," Thomson says.

The issues highlighted in the study could be considered by policymakers investigating new national smokefree laws or by-laws within towns and cities covering transportation settings, he says.

New Zealand could follow the lead of some US, Canadian and Australian cities and states to reduce the problems associated with smoking at bus stops, he suggests. This includes laws or local by-laws for completely smokefree transportation settings. Auckland is one New Zealand city that has announced plans for smokefree bus stops.

The peer-reviewed study has just been published in the open access international journal *PeerJ*.

Provided by University of Otago

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