

No Smoking and the Law.

There's been a recent debate on the UK Magic bulletin board about whether magicians performing in people's homes should be able to insist on a smoke-free environment. Some just don't like it and want to use the new anti-smoking laws or culture to block it. Some find that smoke exacerbates their asthma. Others are concerned about passive smoking.

Here's Russell Levinson's view.

If you have asthma, or any other condition, you should inform your hosts so they can do what they can to make life comfortable and healthy for you – and they will normally be glad to. If they're not then they are the inconsiderate type that we all try and avoid working with - and never twice.

If you just don't like smoke, then you have no moral right to tell or even ask people in their own homes, who have invited you in to entertain them, not to smoke. Just tell them you don't work in smoking environments when they book you and pass on the gig to someone else.

If you don't want to work in a smoky environment because you fear passive smoking; think again. The passive smoking risk has been massively overblown. You have to watch health and safety statisticians as they invariably use the same trick; they sex up statistics.

Take this quotation for example (taken from <http://www.healthandage.com/public/health-center/30/news/10368/>) “There was a 24 per cent increase in lung cancer risk among those exposed to passive smoking. Those who were highly exposed had a 100 per cent increased risk. And those with a long duration of passive smoking had a 50 per cent increased risk. The researchers believe this to be the strongest evidence yet of an association between smoking and lung cancer. They hope these findings will encourage those countries and cities that have yet to ban smoking in the workplace to hurry up and do so, for the sake of their citizens' health.”

Let's take the most alarming statistic from there. That those who were highly exposed had a 100 per cent increased risk. Now what does that mean? It doesn't mean that they have a 100% likelihood of getting lung cancer. All it means that their chance of getting lung cancer was doubled. Does that sound bad? Let's look again at what it really means.

What is your likelihood, as a complete non-smoker who never experiences smoke, of getting lung cancer? I don't know. Let's guess it's one in 500 000 which is 0.000002. So if you're a passive smoker your risk has doubled! What does that mean? That your chance of getting lung cancer has gone up from 0.000002 to (sharp intake of breath) 0.000004. 0.000004! Blimey, that's pretty terrible isn't it, let's make life hell for smokers and stop them smoking everywhere, even in private clubs, let's cover the land in no smoking signs, let's create new offences, let's stop them enjoying their traditional relaxation in bars and restaurants because of this sharply increased risk (a whole 0.000004!) to passive smoking. Of course I may be wrong in guessing one in 500 000. Even if it was one in 100 000, all it would mean is that the risk, in doubling (or in the sexed up version, "a 100% increased risk") had gone up from 0.00001 to 0.00002. Once you look out for this trick you'll see it everywhere. It's at the root of the way the health and safety establishment scare us by presenting innocuous statistics in the most frightening way possible to create fear, blame legislation, and controls in our society.

By the way - I don't smoke; and a friend died from it - doesn't stop me hating the way the HSE mob (Health & Safety Executive) sex up statistics to introduce restrictions on everyday life.

Sent to me by
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