

Passive smoking 'equals just one cigarette a week'

by Nicholas Farrell

THE first comprehensive research on how much tobacco smoke non-smokers really inhale from passive smoking reveals the amount to be the equivalent of one cigarette a week at most.

The results of the survey released by an independent research laboratory last week suggest that the health risks from passive smoking are non-existent — in stark contrast to the Department of Health's estimate that about 300 non-smokers die each year from illnesses related to passive smoking.

The survey also shows that non-smokers breathe in 100 times more air pollution from other sources, such as petrol fumes containing the known carcinogen benzene.

Scientists at Hazleton Europe, a research laboratory based in Harrogate, attached air sampling devices to 255 non-smoking volunteers for 24 hours.

Previous surveys have mainly relied on questionnaires and testing saliva and urine.

Dr Simon Woolf, senior lecturer in toxicology at University College, London, and an expert on air pollution, said after studying the report: "This is the first time to my knowledge that anyone has actually tried to measure directly the levels of exposure."

He added: "This research suggests that passive smoking

is an unlikely cause of lung cancer."

The survey, published in the American magazine *Environment International*, was sponsored by the Centre for Indoor Research, an organisation funded principally by the American chemical industry but receiving some money from tobacco interests.

It found that most of the volunteers were exposed to the equivalent of just five cigarettes a year and that even the highest exposure was the same as only 50 cigarettes a year.

Dr Keith Phillips, who headed the research team, said: "I'm neither non-smoking or pro-smoking. I'd be more concerned about filling my car up with petrol than sitting in a smoky pub."

But Steve Woodward, deputy director of the anti-smoking pressure group ASH, said: "These monitoring devices are indicators. They're a surrogate for what's actually happening."

The best tests are those that test saliva, urine and blood. Non-smokers with the highest exposure had 10 times as much cotinine in their urine compared to the group with the least exposure.

"I was at a dinner party recently where six out of eight guests were smokers. They smoked before dinner, between courses and after dinner. If you'd have tested me you'd have said I was a smoker."

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