

TIPS FOR WRITING LETTERS

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You can influence elected officials directly by writing letters to them. You can indirectly let them know what you think, and influence your community, by writing letters to the editor of your local paper. Elected officials read letters to the editor to determine what their constituents think.

Keep the following points in mind when writing a letter:

- **Keep it short** (no more than 1 page). Note: newspapers usually have word count limits on letters to the editor.
- Stick to one main point, and support your position with facts (see “Sample Speaking and Writing Points”)
- Write about your personal experience. Explain why you care about protecting all workers from secondhand smoke.
- Be polite.

The points below will help you write a letter to an elected official, or to the editor of your local paper. Remember: make your letter personal. *These are just ideas to help you get started.*

- **Explain why you are writing:**
Example: “I am writing to encourage the city council to take action to eliminate secondhand smoke in public places and workplaces.”
- **Explain what the problem is (this is the place to cite facts):**
Example: “Secondhand smoke is a serious problem. Every year, 53,000 Americans die from diseases caused by exposure to secondhand smoke. The Surgeon General, CDC, and National Toxicology Program of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services have identified secondhand smoke as a cause of cancer, heart disease and other diseases in nonsmokers.”
- **Share how you have been personally affected by secondhand smoke:**
Example: “I have been waiting tables for five years. When I started, I was in perfect shape, running three miles a day. Because of my daily exposure to secondhand smoke, I developed chronic asthma. I cannot even walk up a complete flight of stairs without getting out of breath. All workers deserve the right to a safe, 100% smokefree workplace.”
- **Explain specifically what you are asking for:**
Example: “I hope that the city council will pass an ordinance requiring that all public places and workplaces to be 100% smokefree.”

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