

By DONALD G. McNEIL Jr.

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Susan Kilgore smokes outside now.

It has nothing to do with Dallas's no-smoking laws. She is trying to save her nine cats' lives.

Ms. Kilgore, the founder of Feral Friends, an animal-rescue group, learned last year that secondhand smoke may give pets cancer. She cannot quit, but now she smokes only half a pack a day, on her porch.

"I think they're happier," she said. "I have a paraplegic cat with very light skin, and when I smoked, her eyes would get really red. They do now, but not nearly as much."

A small but growing body of research suggests that secondhand cigarette smoke, which has been shown to harm humans, may harm pets, too.

Lung cancer is rare in dogs: only about 1 dog of 25,000 gets it each year, according to one study. But a 1992 study published in the American Journal of Epidemiology of 51 dogs with lung cancer and 83 dogs with other cancers found that dogs in smoking households had a 60 percent greater risk of lung cancer.

The risk was even higher for dogs with short or medium-sized noses: "everything from pugs to poodles," said the chief author, Dr. John S. Reif, a professor of environmental health at Colorado State University.

A 1998 study, published in the same journal, of 481 dogs with cancer showed that long-nosed dogs like collies and wolfhounds were twice as likely to get nasal cancer if they lived with smokers. Dr. Reif, who also led this study, speculated that carcinogens became trapped in their nasal passages.

In a study published in the same journal last year, veterinarians from the Tufts University veterinary school found that cats whose owners smoked were three times as likely to develop lymphoma.

Lymphoma is the most common cat cancer; it kills quickly and, even with thousands of dollars worth of chemotherapy and radiation, is cured only about half the time. The risks are greater, the study found, if the cat has lived in a smoking household for five years, and greater still if two smokers live there.

The study's conclusions baffled him, Dr. Reif said, because lymphoma is believed to be caused by a virus, and similar cancers in humans are not related to secondhand smoke. "It surprised me, but I'm not saying it's not true," he said.

Dr. David T. Roen, a Clarkston, Wash., veterinarian who writes an animal-care column,

said the virus could be only one risk factor that smoke might worsen. Cats not only inhale smoke but also have fur that "acts as a big filter to trap smoke particles," which it swallows when grooming, he said.

In 47 years of practice, Dr. Hugh B. Norris, a retired veterinarian from San Diego, said he had seen "a lot of pets living with heavy smokers and suffering similar respiratory and cardiac symptoms."

But when Dr. Norris told owners it was their fault, "in most cases, they wouldn't accept it."

Others did, but could not quit.

"I had clients I know were smoking with their dogs in their laps," Dr. Norris said. "People would lie to you and say they'd quit, but you could smell it on their dogs."

Perhaps the city most famous for small dogs and heavy smokers is Paris.

Dr. Josephine Schmidt, a veterinarian in Paris, said she had many patients who seemed intent on killing both themselves and their animals with cigarettes.

One lung cancer patient, Dr. Schmidt said, sat smoking in her waiting room with an oxygen bottle and a poodle with heart problems.

"We told her she really needed to stop, but she got angry, so there was not much we could do," Dr. Schmidt said.

Several Parisians interviewed seemed to agree more with Dr. Schmidt's reluctant patients than with her.

"We all smoke in my family, but we never noticed that it disturbs him, never," François Godonneix, 24, said of his 4-year-old Labrador.

Lauren Douis, 24, a self-described heavy smoker, seemed surprised at the idea that she might be hurting her 9-month-old West Highland terrier. "I never thought it," she said. "I noticed, though, that when there is a lot of smoke, he sneezes and goes in the other direction."

And Jean-Louis Mellerio, 58, an interior decorator, said his Basenji did not mind his cigars, even in the car. "I feel he knows when I'm smoking a good or bad quality cigar," he said. "Our vet never said anything about smoke being bad for our dog."

Carole Corm contributed reporting from Paris for this article.