

Steps to Go Smokefree: Recommendations for Property Owners and Managers

Congratulations on your interest in having a smokefree building! Adopting a smokefree housing policy is legal, easy, and beneficial for everyone.

Property owners, building managers, and homeowners' associations know that a smokefree property is a smart business decision.

You are in good company and there is helpful advice to support you in the process. The steps outlined below can help you adopt and implement a smokefree policy for your multi-unit property.



☐ **Getting started:**

- ☐ **Familiarize yourself** with the [Benefits of Smokefree Buildings](#) and [Frequently Asked Questions from Housing Providers](#) to learn why you should consider implementing a smokefree policy and find answers to common questions and concerns.
- ☐ **Learn about local or state laws** that may have smokefree requirements for multi-unit properties. Check out the ANR Foundation's list of [Local Laws for Smokefree Multi-Unit Housing](#) to find out if your community has a law that regulates smoking and vaping in your building(s).
- ☐ **Connect with local partners.** Many cities, counties, and states have resources to assist housing providers. **Contact your local health department** to find out if the tobacco prevention program can provide assistance, such as flyers to educate residents, signs for your building, or smoking cessation information.

- ☐ **Involve your team.** Everyone working at your properties should be involved in discussions and the planning process. This may include the property owner, property manager(s), and maintenance staff, and affordable housing providers may also have resident services providers, resident councils, or other partners. Take time to build understanding and buy-in early in the process because they will be on the front lines of implementing and enforcing the policy.

- ☐ **Create a timeline** and decide what needs to get done, when it should get done, and who will be responsible for accomplishing each task.

- ☐ **Educate your residents** about the health risks of breathing secondhand smoke and the health benefits of living in a smokefree building.

- ☐ **Did you know?** There's no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke and smoke can drift between units. That means the only way to protect people's health is by not allowing the smoking of tobacco or cannabis/marijuana anywhere in the building.
- ☐ A smokefree policy creates a healthier and safer living environment for everyone in the building, including people who smoke and their families. A smokefree building can improve the quality of the air people breathe, reduce the risk of tobacco-related illnesses, and reduce the risk of fire.
- ☐ You can share the [Secondhand Smoke in Housing Infographic](#) and the [CDC's fact sheet on secondhand smoke in housing](#) with your residents and post them in the building(s).

- ☐ **Survey your residents** to get their thoughts about secondhand smoke exposure in and around the building, and to learn their questions and concerns about having a smokefree policy. Hearing from residents can help you move forward in an informed manner, including identifying issues that might need extra attention. This [Sample Survey for Multi-Unit Residents](#) can help you start the process.
- ☐ **Decide on your policy details.**
 - ☐ **What does a smokefree policy look like?** A strong policy should prohibit smoking and vaping in all indoor areas of your building(s), including all units and indoor common areas, as well as outdoor private use spaces like balconies, decks, and patios. Many policies also prohibit smoking and vaping in outdoor common areas like courtyards and entryways, and within 25 feet of doors and windows to prevent smoke from drifting back into the building.
 - ☐ **Include all types of smoking.** The best practice is to define smoking as the use of cigarettes, cigars, hookah, and other combustible tobacco products, as well as using vaping products/electronic smoking devices, and the smoking and vaping of marijuana/cannabis. See the [Model Smokefree Lease Addendum](#) for definitions and other helpful language.

Did you know? Secondhand smoke from marijuana/cannabis is not harmless. Research shows that [marijuana smoke](#) poses similar health risks as tobacco smoke. It is legal to include marijuana in your policy that regulates where smoking and vaping is not allowed.
 - ☐ **Include all residents.** Your policy should apply equally to all residents on the same date, and you should not exempt residents already living in the building. Allowing some residents to continue smoking in the building will not address the problem of drifting smoke, improve the health of residents, or reduce the risk of fire. It also creates confusion and enforcement difficulties for managers. Experience shows that a simple, strong, and fair policy that applies equally to all residents and all types of smoking and vaping is easier for everyone involved to understand, follow, and enforce.
 - ☐ **Involve your residents** in the process of deciding some policy details, such as where signs should be placed in and around the building and where a designated outdoor smoking area could be located. Also ask for feedback on the best ways to communicate with residents about the policy and if there are specific concerns or questions you can address.
 - ☐ **Choose an effective date** when your building(s) will go smokefree. Six to twelve months is common. You can choose whether A) the policy will go into effect on one date for all residents, or B) the policy will roll out over the next year as residents sign lease renewals.
- ☐ **Adopt the policy.** Follow the same procedures and legal requirements that you follow for making other changes to your lease provisions, house rules, or HOA policies. This includes changing lease language and updating any other policy documents. Be sure to follow any local or state requirements for making changes to your lease/rules, such as providing advance notice to residents.
- ☐ **Create a smokefree lease addendum.** Use the [model smokefree lease addendum](#) to adapt your own version. Decide on a process for having all residents sign the addendum by the effective date. Some properties create a smokefree lease addendum for existing residents to sign, and they add the smokefree language to the main lease, which is signed by new incoming residents.
- ☐ **Order smokefree signs** in advance of the implementation date in all languages needed. Contact your local tobacco prevention program to see if they or community partners are able to provide signs.
- ☐ **Develop a compliance plan and train staff.** Make sure your property manager(s) and other staff are trained on why the policy is being adopted, where smoking/vaping is not allowed, how compliance and violations will be addressed, what will count as evidence of a violation, and roles and responsibilities.

Share information about the policy with them in writing and discuss how to talk with residents, including addressing questions and concerns. See our [Enforcement Tips for Property Owners and Managers](#).

- ☐ **Communicate your policy with residents.** Notify all residents to formally announce the policy change. Include the details of the policy, the effective date, how residents and their guests can comply with the policy, how complaints and violations will be addressed, and information about cessation resources. It is helpful to create a Frequently Asked Questions flyer. Communicate in a variety of ways, including in rent reminders, by email, posting flyers or a banner in the lobby, and talking about it at resident meetings, in a newsletter, or on social media. Have information available in multiple languages if necessary.

Address common concerns: Remind residents that people who smoke can still live in your building, and they don't need to quit. A smokefree policy doesn't prohibit people from smoking, but it does regulate where it's allowed to protect the health and safety of all residents.

- ☐ **Hold resident meetings** to discuss the policy change prior to implementation. Meetings provide an opportunity to explain the policy details, what is expected of residents and their guests to comply, and how complaints and violations will be addressed. Meetings allow residents to ask questions and raise concerns, so you can clarify misconceptions and provide answers. Consider holding meetings at several different times (weekday evening; weekend morning) to increase the ability of residents to attend. Ask your local health department if they can participate in meetings. Have bilingual staff or community partners present if necessary. See our tipsheet on [Talking with Residents about Your Building's Smokefree Policy](#).
- ☐ **Connect residents with cessation resources.** Contact your local health department to learn what cessation resources are available locally. Providing cessation information supports your residents who may want to quit or cut back, and it can help them adjust to living in a smokefree building.
- ☐ **Have residents sign the smokefree lease.** Set a date by which all current residents need to sign a smokefree lease addendum and provide instructions on how they can set up an appointment to sign it. Have all incoming new residents sign a smokefree lease. Be sure to explain the policy requirements and expectations to all residents before they sign the addendum/lease.
- ☐ **Post signs** in visible areas at building entrances, in common areas (lobby, landings, other common areas), and in outdoor locations (entryways, gate, courtyard, etc.). Signs are an important part of achieving compliance by letting residents, guests, and staff know where people can and cannot smoke.
- ☐ **Implement your policy.** Remind residents about the new policy leading up to the implementation date by mail, email, at meetings, in newsletters, on social media, posters in the lobby, or any other communication channels you typically use. Make sure all residents have signed a lease addendum, replace all old signs with new ones, remove any ashtrays from indoors and within 25 feet of doors, and clean up tobacco waste (cigarette butts, vape cartridges). Most people comply with smokefree policies when they know what is expected.
- ☐ **Enforce the policy change.**
 - ☐ Your policy can be enforced similar to other lease provisions or rules, but with the understanding that living in a smokefree building can be a difficult adjustment for people who smoke or vape.
 - ☐ A graduated enforcement process is recommended, which should center on educating residents to help them comply with the policy. Graduated enforcement steps might look like providing verbal and written reminders—including educational information and cessation referrals—for the first few violations, before moving to a written warning, and then to other potential consequences for additional violations.

- ☐ Develop a process for tracking and responding to complaints. Document each reported violation, as well as evidence of each violation, and save this information in the resident's file.
- ☐ Let residents know how they can report a suspected violation and follow through on all reported violations. Set an expectation of good compliance and respect for fellow residents.
- ☐ For more information, see [Enforcement Tips for Property Owners and Managers](#).
- ☐ **Remember:** The goal is to have a healthier living environment for all residents. Enforcement actions should focus on educating and working with residents to help them follow the policy and should not focus on punishing people. Eviction should only ever be the last resort after all other steps have been exhausted.
- ☐ **Promote your policy.** A smokefree building is an amenity that many people desire. Make it easy for prospective residents to know that your building offers a smokefree living environment by advertising the policy in your rental listings, on your website, and other advertisements or promotions.
- ☐ **Sustain compliance:**
 - ☐ **Continue to engage residents** about the policy to address concerns or challenges.
 - ☐ **Educate all incoming residents** about the policy.
 - ☐ **Consider if any changes need to be made** to improve the process of addressing complaints and violations after your policy has been in effect for a few months.
 - ☐ **Consider surveying residents** 6 months or 1 year after the policy is implemented. Ask similar questions to your initial survey to learn if exposure to secondhand smoke has changed, what people think about compliance with the policy, and if people have suggested improvements.
 - ☐ **Evaluate if your cleaning costs**, turnover time, and maintenance needs have changed.
 - ☐ **Thank residents** for their cooperation.
- ☐ **Resources for smokefree housing:**
 - [The Benefits of Smokefree Buildings](#)
 - [Frequently Asked Questions from Housing Providers About Smokefree Buildings](#)
 - [Sample Survey for Multi-Unit Housing Residents \(Word document\)](#)
 - [Model Smokefree Lease Addendum](#)
 - [Tips For Housing Providers: Talking with Residents About Your Building's Smokefree Policy](#)
 - [Enforcement Tips for Property Owners and Managers](#)
 - [Health Equity and Enforcing Smokefree Multi-Unit Housing](#)
 - [List of Local Laws for Smokefree Multi-Unit Housing](#)
 - [Secondhand Smoke in Housing Infographic](#)
 - [Secondhand Marijuana Smoke Fact Sheet](#)

More resources are available at no-smoke.org/at-risk-places/homes/