

Tips for Housing Providers: Talking with Residents about Your Building's Smokefree Policy

A key part of adopting a smokefree building policy is communicating with residents and engaging them in a conversation about what a smokefree building means for them. Here are some ways that building owners and managers can communicate with residents about why your building is going smokefree and how it is beneficial to them.

Open Communication:

- Communicate with residents **early and often** about the policy. Ask for resident input from the start since the policy change directly affects their lives.
- **Ask for resident input** before the policy is implemented to give residents an opportunity to voice their opinions. Conduct a resident survey by putting an anonymous survey in each mailbox. Their responses can help you address concerns and questions before the policy goes into effect. Sample surveys are available in our [Resources & Tools for Smokefree Multi-Unit Housing](#).
- **Use a positive message** about why the smokefree policy is being adopted, which can help residents understand and accept the new policy, which in turn can help increase compliance down the road.
- **Send a letter** to each unit when the policy is adopted to let residents know what the new rule means, how they can comply, where they can get help to quit smoking, and who to call to ask questions. Sample letters are in our [Resources & Tools for Smokefree Multi-Unit Housing](#).
- **Post flyers** in the lobby and on each floor to remind people of the upcoming change: "For the health of our residents, our building is going smokefree on [date]. Learn more at a meeting on [date]."
- **Use all lines of communication.** Put a reminder in upcoming notices or mailings, mention it at resident council meetings, put up a poster in the laundry room, etc.
- **Encourage questions** from residents about their concerns. Honest conversations with residents can help them feel more comfortable and less anxious about the policy change.
- **Host a meeting** for residents. Meetings are a critical part of implementing the policy. Talk with residents about the policy, how it will improve health and safety, how they can get support if they want to quit smoking, how complaints and violations will be addressed, and encourage them to ask questions. Hearing about concerns can also help staff plan better and address hot topics to make the transition easier and improve compliance.
- **Explain scope of policy.** Your policy should cover all lit tobacco products, including hookahs. Also, clarify if the policy prohibits the use of [electronic smoking devices](#) (vaping). Likewise, be clear about whether your policy prohibits smoking [marijuana](#). Marijuana



use is prohibited in all federally funded housing, including public housing. Your policy can prohibit smoking and vaping marijuana, even in states that have legalized medical or recreational use. ANRF recommends including electronic smoking devices and marijuana in all smokefree policies because they release unhealthy pollutants into the air that pose health risks for other residents.

- **Work together** with management, maintenance staff, resident councils, resident services, social services, visiting nurses, local public health groups, and others who can help educate residents about the policy, and lend support to people who have concerns or are having trouble with compliance.

Resident Champions:

- **Look for resident champions** to help you spread the word about the smokefree policy. Who is the person in your building who knows everyone, has the respect of their neighbors, and knows what's going on with everyone? Ask the resident council for recommendations. People who like living in a smokefree building—or are excited for the building to go smokefree—might be great champions.
- **How can champions be helpful?**
 - **Their opinions matter.** Champions can help spread the word about the policy through their social circles.
 - Ask champions to **share what a smokefree building means** to them. They might say: “I have asthma and I can breathe better now that there’s no smoke coming into my apartment,” or “I’ve been meaning to quit smoking and this is a good reason to try again.”
 - **Create an informational flyer** that features quotes. It’s great to include photos too! You can post the flyer in the building or put in mailboxes.
 - Ask your champion to **share their story at a resident meeting**. Residents talking about why smokefree is important to them can personalize the issue and build support among neighbors.
 - Champions **help encourage compliance** by reminding others that smoking is not allowed inside and where they can go outside to smoke. Neighbors are a key part of good compliance. A word from a respected neighbor about keeping the air clean for everyone can carry a lot of weight.



Talking about the dangers of secondhand smoke:

- Educate residents about how secondhand smoke is harmful. Remind them that the building is going smokefree because of the health concerns and fire risk.
- There's no safe level of secondhand smoke exposure. Even breathing a small amount of smoke, or breathing smoke only once in a while, can be harmful to health.
- Secondhand smoke can drift through buildings and enter common areas and other people's units. Smoke drifts through doors, windows, halls, and ventilation ducts, and through gaps around outlets and fixtures.
- Our building is smokefree because the only way to protect health is not to allow smoking indoors.
- Taking the smoke outside keeps the air healthier and the building cleaner. There is less damage to the building from smoke, burns, and fire.



- Everyone has the right to breathe smokefree air at home. No one should get sick from breathing someone else's smoke.
- Smoking in home increases the risk of fire. Fires caused by cigarettes are the leading cause of residential fire deaths in the U.S.
- Let residents know how they can anonymously report a suspected violation. Remind them that it's safe and important to tell staff or management about violations to this health and safety policy.



Talking about the benefits of a smokefree building:

- **Let residents know that smokefree buildings:**

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|------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| ➤ Reduce secondhand smoke exposure | ➤ Make it easier to breathe |
| ➤ Improve health | ➤ Are healthier for children |
| ➤ Improve air quality | ➤ Are healthier for pets |
| ➤ Help people quit smoking | ➤ Reduce damage |
| ➤ Reduce the risk of fires | ➤ Smell fresher and stay cleaner |

- **Our building is going smokefree so that everyone has a healthier and cleaner living environment.**

- **Smokefree buildings keep kids healthier.** Secondhand smoke causes many health and development problems for babies and children, including more frequent and severe asthma attacks, respiratory infections, ear infections, sudden infant death syndrome (SIDS), and behavioral problems.



- **Smokefree buildings help older residents stay healthier.** Seniors are more likely to have health issues that are made worse by breathing secondhand smoke, like COPD, heart disease, emphysema, diabetes. Even in healthy adults, secondhand smoke increases the risk of heart attack and stroke.

- **Smokefree buildings keep your pets healthier.** Did you know that pets can get sick from breathing secondhand smoke and licking tobacco residue off their fur?

Talking with residents who smoke:

- It is important to **avoid stigmatizing residents who smoke** by connecting them with smoking cessation opportunities and services. This can help residents feel supported as they approach the transition to living in a smokefree building, which may feel intimidating and frustrating.

- Remind residents that **no one needs to quit smoking** and **no one needs to move out**. People simply need to go outdoors to smoke.

- Let them know this policy is **not against them personally**, it's about the smoke. The smoke is the problem because it harms the health of neighbors, creates a fire risk, and damages the building.

- Tell residents—and staff—about local **smoking cessation support** options that are available in case they want help quitting smoking or cutting down how much they smoke. A new smokefree building is the perfect time to quit! Some cessation programs offer on-site classes which might be of interest to residents.



- See if residents are interested in a **peer support network** or on-site cessation class. Neighbors can be a good support for each other as they figure out the best ways to take their smoking outside and consider cutting down or quitting.
- Work with cessation resources to offer free or reduced-price **cessation aids**, such as a month's supply of nicotine replacement patches or gum. This may be motivating for residents who want to comply with the policy while addressing nighttime cravings.
- **Smokefree policies are not discriminatory.** Residents might ask if it is discriminatory against smokers to have a smokefree policy. It is legal to regulate where smoking is allowed because there is no constitutional "right to smoke" and people who smoke are not a protected class. Housing providers have the right to set reasonable health and safety rules to protect the property and residents.
- **Reasonable accommodation.** Residents with disabilities can request a reasonable accommodation related to policies and rules. However, in HUD-funded buildings, a reasonable accommodation for people who smoke cannot include smoking indoors. Any accommodation for smokers must be "in compliance with the requirements of the [Public Housing Agency]'s smoke-free policies." See HUD's [implementation guidance memo](#) for more information about accommodations in public housing.
- **Work through challenges with residents.** Some buildings create a designated outdoor smoking location that is located away from doors and windows. Work together to find a **convenient outdoor location** to smoke. Could a person with limited mobility **move to a first floor unit** or one that is close to a door/elevator to make it easier to get outside? Some residents who smoke have used a **nicotine replacement patch** during the night so that they do not have to go outside.
- Connect residents who smoke with **resident services** or other social services to develop a plan to manage their smoking and still be in compliance with the policy.
- **Listen and engage people** who are most impacted by the smokefree policy. Ask what they need. Residents and resident councils can help guide staff to good solutions that support them while also meeting the goals of the policy.



A thoughtful implementation and compliance process that involves frequent and open communication with residents can help all residents breathe easier while also helping to support residents who smoke.

More information is available on our [Homes](#) page or by [contacting us](#) or phoning 510-841-3032.

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