

Part III

Real Stories, Real Success: Smoke-Free Policies in Action

This section offers true stories from public housing authorities (PHAs) and agents/owners who share “how” and “why” they implemented a smoke-free policy. You will be able to identify with these pioneers from all over the country as they explain the benefits, challenges, sources of support and other lessons learned from first-hand experience. Some of the questions they respond to include:

- **What motivated you to implement a smoke-free policy?**
- **Were your current staff and resources sufficient to take on this program?**
- **How did the smoke-free policy affect occupancy rates and turnover?**
- **What did you do about residents who were addicted to nicotine?**
- **Have you seen any cost savings?**
- **How do you enforce the smoke-free policy?**

You will appreciate their candid comments, perceptive insights, and practical suggestions for implementation.

Q&As with Nine Smoke-Free Policy Pioneers

Transitioning from thinking about doing something to actually doing it, often involves overcoming obstacles. Considering a smoke-free policy and actually adopting one is no different. Every PHA and owner/manager goes through a similar process: exploring and overcoming concerns; building buy-in from staff and residents; developing a plan; and moving forward. For those who have not adopted a smoke-free policy, these steps can feel daunting. Often there is a belief that something must be different about the properties that were able to go smoke-free, such as residents who advocated for it, targeted funding to implement it, or management compelled to impose it. The experience of implementers, however, demonstrates that implementing a smoke-free policy is something every PHA or owner/manager can do.

The following nine profiles of PHAs and owners/agents of project-based Section 8 and market rate properties are derived from interviews conducted with smoke-free pioneers, early adopters of smoke-free housing policies. They have remained committed to the intent of their policies, and each reported that the policies are still effective. They all followed a similar pathway to adoption, implementation, and enforcement of a smoke-free policy.

The comments from people that appear in this guide represent their own opinions and recommendations, and do not represent official HUD policy. As you read their profiles, find the stories with which you most identify.



Gail Livingston
Deputy Administrator for Housing Programs,
Boston Housing Authority

Boston, Massachusetts
Smoke-free since 2012

What motivated Boston Housing Authority to implement a smoke-free policy?

Over the last several years, we began to receive a large number of requests for reasonable accommodations from people who had respiratory problems; people wanting to be in an area where they would not be around cigarette smoke. Without a non-smoking policy, there was no way to manage that problem or guarantee that type of housing.

Small housing authorities are concerned they do not have the staff and resources to take this on. Is it as time consuming as people fear?

It is just a question of deciding what is important to do. You can adjust the amount of time it takes you on a day-to-day basis by figuring out what your implementation schedule is and how much time you are going to spend on this.

Has the smoke-free policy affected your occupancy?

Vacancy was not an issue for us when we implemented the smoke-free policy. Our federal portfolio is at 98.5 percent occupancy.

How do you enforce the policy?

We have a five-step process. The first thing we do when we get a complaint, is to have the manager go to the unit, give the resident a copy of the policy, and notify the resident that management has received a complaint about smoking. We also provide the resident with a reminder of the smoke-free policy. If there is a second complaint, the manager has a second conversation with the resident and reports the actual complaint. A third complaint results in the resident receiving a written notice of violation and we hold a private conference with that resident. Either the person agrees to comply or not. Then we talk with the legal department to determine what additional enforcement actions can be taken including bringing the case to court. To date, we have not had to do this.



The Boston Housing Authority (BHA) houses approximately 10 percent of the city's residents through the affordable housing programs it administers, including Section 8. The BHA consists of a mix of low-, medium-, and high-rise buildings and townhouses.

Boston was the first large city in Massachusetts, and the largest in the nation, to ban smoking in public housing, beginning in September 2012.

We say this is smoke-free housing, not smoker-free housing. Residents can go outside to smoke. For residents with mobility issues, we have made reasonable accommodations where we transferred them to a unit that is closer to an elevator or door to facilitate their ability to go outside to smoke.

Is enforcement working well enough to have the policy?

Working with residents is crucial. We have facilitated smoking cessation programs and have given people opportunities to quit smoking through a variety of different avenues. Some of our residents are very good about giving us information regarding people who smoke in their units. This is helpful because we cannot be in every building every day. *The great thing is that if someone is bothered by smoke, now we can do something. Encourage residents to take responsibility to report the smoke but not be confrontational with other residents who do smoke.*

Is it important to have someone in management who champions the smoke-free policy?

It is so crucial that there be a real commitment at a high level within the housing authority. In addition to (then) Mayor Menino making a public statement that the housing authority was going smoke-free, Bill McGonagle, the administrator of the housing authority, was 100 percent behind it. He just said, “We are doing this; we are moving forward.”

All of the work that we’ve done over the past decade with the public health commission and other partners gave us a group of people to support and work with us. That was crucial, because having partners and other agencies working with us provides political and technical support, which is very important.



Scott Alderman
President, Landura Management Associates
Winston-Salem, North Carolina
Smoke-free since 2010

Describe Landura Management Associates' portfolio.

We currently conduct business in Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, and Kentucky. We also have two properties in Washington State. We manage over 4,500 units of affordable housing properties. Our properties include: one-story senior housing, all predominately under one roof, and family communities in different multilevel buildings. All of our properties are rural, and 85 percent of them are owned by Landura. The rest are fee-managed.

What motivated Landura's decision to go 100 percent smoke-free across the portfolio?

In September of 2009, HUD issued a letter to owners and agents saying that they were in support of smoke-free housing. It could not have come at a better time because in January of 2010, we had two very large smoking-related apartment fires within a 10-day period that cost us well over \$1 million. Both incidents involved smoking and oxygen tanks in the unit. Therefore, for us to try to protect assets, residents, owners, and lenders, we decided we had to do something. Because the recent smoke-free housing letter had come out, we thought we should be able to implement it without much roadblock.

Many properties are going smoke-free for the health benefit of residents. I am doing it for the benefit of the properties and safety.

How did you convince your staff to support the policy?

To get everybody on board, it had to start with me and go all the way down. It was not difficult to get my regional staff on board because they all work out of our home office. When we had those big fires, they saw up close how devastating it was. With a 40-unit elderly property and 10 units destroyed, the other 30 units had to move out too because the safety system in the building was compromised by the fire.



Rural southeastern U.S. is known to be big tobacco country, yet Landura Management effectively drew a line when it came to smoking inside its properties, implementing a smoke-free policy years before the idea took hold among other property owners/agents around the country.

Landura specializes in the management of apartment communities; primarily affordable housing sponsored by Rural Development of U.S. Department of Agriculture, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and various state housing finance agencies.



Photo credit: Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch in Raleigh, NC

How did you roll out the policy?

We sent letters to the residents that said, “Here’s what is going to happen, here are the revisions to the lease, here is a copy of the lease addendum, here are frequently asked questions and smoking cessation information, and here are the warnings that you will get.” We received very little pushback.

How do you enforce the policy?

We enforce it just like any other lease rule or regulation. We don’t use undercover tactics or have folks spying on everybody. We have found that residents will report other residents if they see them smoking. We go in all of our units at least monthly to change A/C filters and check for pests, which provides a regular inspection system for evidence of smoking. If we go into a unit and we can smell it or see it, it gets reported. If they violate the policy, we give residents terminations and warnings just like we do for any other lease violation.

“They have to know that you are serious about it, which is key.”

- Scott Alderman,
President, Landura
Management Associates

When we find smoking, we issue a written warning that says the resident must immediately stop smoking in the unit. If it continues, we give another. The third time, we go to court. We've had two eviction cases since we started this in 2010: one in North Carolina and one in Virginia. We won both. The magistrates are looking at it as lease violations. There have only been two evictions because when we give terminations for violating the smoking policy, most of our residents are saying, "OK, I will start abiding by it," or they leave and go to another property that allows it.

What kinds of savings have you seen?

Our operating costs have dropped a lot. We have had some of our bigger properties drop \$5,000 to \$6,000 per year. It is phenomenal. We are saving around \$100 per unit, per year in turnover costs. I know it may not sound like a lot, but if you run on shoestring budgets that is a lot of money.

What's been the impact on occupancy and turnover?

That seems to be the biggest concern I hear from other property managers by far. I can tell you that last month we had a 2 to 3 percent vacancy rate across the properties. If residents leave because of the policy, it is not hurting vacancy because we are able to lease the units again. We also use our smoke-free policy as a marketing tool: prospective residents can come and live in a unit that has been smoke-free for two years now.

Someone I know at a large management company that conducts business in the same towns, said to me, "When you implemented this, I was just waiting with open arms to welcome everybody that ran from your property." Then he said it never happened. Now two to three years later, they are doing the same thing we did, implementing smoke-free policies.

"People are getting used to smoke-free living. There are various kinds of smoking policies everywhere. You have to go through a paradigm shift on what is acceptable and what isn't before everything becomes normalized. People finally got on board and understood the policy."

- *Scott Alderman,
President, Landura
Management Associates*

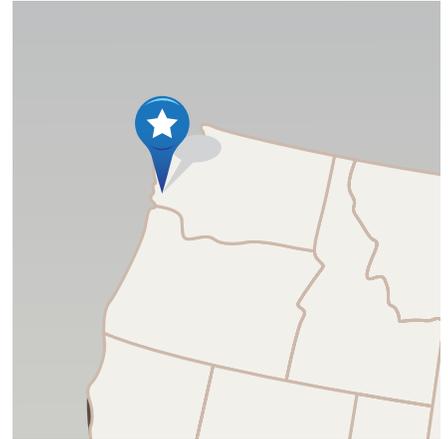
Bill Cook
Director of Property Management,
King County Housing Authority
Tukwila, Washington
Smoke-free since 2012

What motivated King County Housing Authority to implement a smoke-free policy?

The argument we made as leadership was that this is the best thing, health-wise, for our residents, and maybe more importantly, for our employees. Front-line field staff, whether they are maintenance or managers doing inspections, are in units far more than anyone else, except for the residents who live there. Exposing our employees to secondhand smoke as part of their work environment is not acceptable. We had employees who've worked at the housing authority for 20 plus years and did not really realize how much smoke they were encountering in their day-to-day work until we implemented the policy.

How did the smoke-free policy effort evolve?

In 2006, we started an internal workgroup to look at converting either some or all of our housing to non-smoking. The group was comprised of property management staff, resident services staff, representatives from our repair and weatherization department, and representatives from our Section 8 department. The workgroup met for about a year to create a plan for implementing a smoke-free policy. From those meetings we decided to pilot the policy at three properties, see how it went, and then consider expanding. The transitions at the pilot properties went well. A year and a half later, we expanded to about another 13 properties. Then about two-and-a-half years after that, we decided to convert all of our properties.



King County Housing Authority owns and manages almost 3,300 units of subsidized housing for families, the elderly, and those with disabilities. All of the senior housing is mid-or high-rise buildings. More than 4,500 units of other rental housing are financed through tax credits or tax-exempt bonds.

King County wanted to ensure their properties support the health and safety of staff and residents. Their policy offers a compassionate, supportive approach to assisting residents with compliance, which they learned from Home Forward, the housing authority in Portland, Oregon.

How does your policy handle people who are struggling to quit smoking or to comply with the rule?

The reality is that none of us want to see an 83-year old woman lose her housing because she can't physically get outside on a regular basis to smoke. That is when we inserted into our process an interactive last step before we got to an eviction. Our resident services department tries to work with the resident on quitting, or to help them get themselves outside regularly to smoke. For us this is a fail-safe mechanism, so that we would not get to enforcement and have to go to court, unless somebody was just absolutely refusing to follow the smoke-free policy.

How is the policy enforced?

We put enforcement of non-smoking near the top of our list of things that we want our site staff to be proactive about. At the first complaint, the site manager visits that unit and speaks with the resident who is being complained about to find out what is going on and see if there is evidence. Then, we send a follow-up letter thanking them for meeting with the site manager and reminding them of the policy. If we receive a second complaint, we have a formal meeting between that resident and the property manager to talk about the complaint. At that point the person is issued a 10-day notice, which is a legal notice from us. If we get a third complaint, we send another 10-day notice. If that 10-day notice is violated within those 10 days, a 30-day notice is sent to the resident. This is basically an eviction notice. We have never had to get to that point.

What did your local health department do to support the smoke-free policy?

The King County Department of Health has been a really good partner. They came to all of our resident meetings, provided cessation materials, and answered questions. Our resident services department is excellent and can definitely forward cessation information and materials to a resident, but when you have the Department of Health or a similar group involved, it really takes it to another level.



“Before we implemented it, internally we asked if we were prepared to evict somebody over violating a smoke-free policy. It took some time to find an answer we were comfortable with.”

- Bill Cook, Director of Property Management, King County Housing Authority

**Rick Ball, Executive Director and
Diane Martin, Property Manager**
Housing and Redevelopment Authority of Duluth
Duluth, Minnesota
Smoke-free since 2011

What motivated the Housing and Redevelopment Authority of Duluth to implement a smoke-free policy?

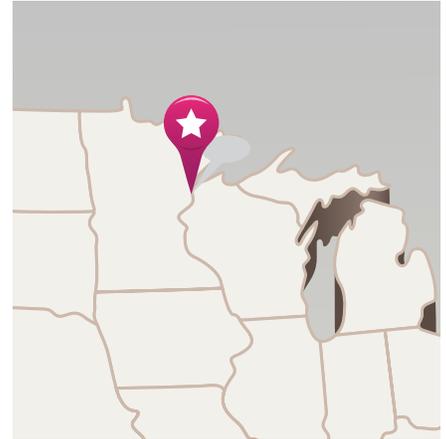
We experienced a death in one of our high-rise units: a person who had been smoking in his room fell asleep while smoking. The cigarette caught fire, and before the sprinkler system put out the fire, the person died from smoke inhalation. We began talking with folks at the American Lung Association who encourage smoke-free housing. We see it as a health issue and also a finance issue because of the expense smoking incurs.

Initially, we were concerned about the kind of reaction our residents would have. However, in the resident meetings, we learned that a majority of people would prefer to have a smoke-free environment and were actually bothered by secondhand smoke.

As one of the staff who was initially resistant to the idea, what got you on board?

There was a fire in our building caused by cigarettes. Seeing the damage was more than enough to convince me that smoking in the buildings needed to stop.

In the beginning, I was concerned about the ability to monitor it: how we would track violations, what it would take to evict someone if there were violations, and ultimately how we would track where the smoke was coming from. I was adamant that the policy was going to take too much effort, and we were going to be spending our whole lives to get people to stop smoking. It was not actually like that at all.



The Housing and Redevelopment Authority of Duluth is smoke-free in all five of its high rise buildings, which mainly house seniors and individuals with special needs.

Winters in Duluth, Minnesota are long and cold. People keep windows closed for a large percentage of the year, reducing ventilation. A smoke-free policy can be more important and beneficial in this type of climate. Their success with the policy demonstrates the importance of looking past climate as a barrier, and it points to the value of partnering with an organization like the American Lung Association that can assist with implementation.



Photo credit: American Lung Association in Florida

Has the smoke-free policy been worth it?

If I had to do it over again, I would. It was worth it. The buildings are better off without smoking. In the beginning, the policy did take a lot of time and resources, but things have settled down. **There have been a lot of maintenance savings, as it takes less time to turn a unit because it is not cigarette-damaged with burns in carpets or nicotine-stained walls. It really did not cost that much to implement.** Your staff already has to do their inspections, so they might as well check for evidence of smoking while they are on site. *You may pay up front; but in the long run, you are going to be saving money and saving lives, which is the bigger picture.*

“I was concerned about the ability to monitor it, how we would track violations, what it would take to evict someone if there were violations, and ultimately how we would track where the smoke was coming from. I was adamant that the policy was going to take too much effort, and we were going to be spending our whole lives to get people to stop smoking. It was not actually like that at all.”

- Rick Ball, Executive Director, Housing and Redevelopment Authority of Duluth

Scott Wilkerson
Principal and Chief Operating Officer
Ginkgo Residential
Charlotte, North Carolina
Smoke-free since 2007

What motivated Ginkgo Residential to implement a smoke-free policy?

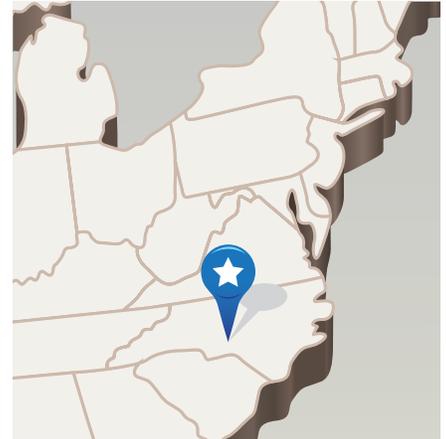
The primary trigger was that we had about \$4 million in damages from fires caused by the improper disposal of cigarettes. We had discussed smoke-free housing for several years, but no one was actually implementing any policies then. Our investors were very skeptical. We selected two properties to pilot the policy in areas that were progressive on anti-smoking. This went so well that we expanded.

How did Ginkgo inform residents when you converted properties, and how do you communicate it to prospective residents?

We put out a simple survey. There were an overwhelming number of residents who wanted smoke-free housing. When we announced the results, we notified residents about the policy implementation timeframe. We advertise it in our brochures, newsletters, and in any information we hand out to prospective residents. We also have signs and large maps on our properties saying we are a smoke-free community and showing the locations of the smoking stations. We provide designated smoking stations, which include a nice wood bench with permanently mounted ashtrays that are accessible and well-lit.

How long does the implementation process take to convert a property to smoke-free?

For us, it takes about 18 months because we grandfather in smokers on existing leases. When a resident's lease is up for renewal, they either sign the lease addendum or they move out.



Ginkgo Residential focuses on middle-market rental housing with a mix of two- and three-story apartment buildings and townhouses. Since 2007, Ginkgo has converted 10,000 units in North Carolina, South Carolina, Virginia, Florida, and Texas to smoke-free housing.

Ginkgo Residential has a clear vision of responsible property investing, which they define as a focus on people, planet, and profit. Years ago, they stepped ahead of their industry and embraced water-efficient fixtures, ENERGY STAR appliances, efficient lighting, and low VOC paint and carpeting. A smoke-free policy was a natural extension of these principles, but it was counter-cultural for the South.

How is the policy enforced?

The policy is mainly self-enforcing, because the residents like the policy and do not smoke in the buildings. All residents have a responsibility to notify the management if someone is smoking in the building. When someone calls us to complain about a neighbor smoking, we call that resident to remind him or her of the policy. If the resident admits that someone was smoking in a unit, we will give an official verbal warning. A second or third offense results in a written warning. A fourth offense is a \$250 fine paid to the American Lung Association [Editor's Note: a fine can be imposed in market rate housing but not in public or federally assisted multifamily housing. A public or subsidized multifamily housing resident can be charged for property damage or cleaning due to smoke damage at the end of their tenancy.] We have only had a few of these instances so far; most people never get to this point. *We have not taken anyone to court over the policy.* In every continuing violation case we have had, once we send an eviction notice letter, the tenant moves out.

Has the smoke-free policy affected your occupancy rate?

If anything, we have seen an increase in our occupancy rate. We believe there are many more people who want to rent from us specifically because our properties are smoke-free. This includes smokers who do not smoke in their units and do not want anybody smoking in their building.

What was the greatest challenge about implementing a smoke-free policy?

Getting the buy-in from all the people involved: the owners, investors, and staff members. You have to convince them that this is the right thing to do. As a company, we were afraid of a smoke-free policy and debated implementing one for years. We were afraid we were going to lose our customer base and many people would move out. But our customers want smoke-free housing. We see survey results where 75 percent of residents prefer smoke-free housing and 50 percent would pay more for it.



“We have not taken anyone to court over the policy. In every continuing violation case we have had, once we send an eviction notice letter, the tenant moves out.”

- Scott Wilkerson, Principal and Chief Operating Officer, Ginkgo Residential

Carmen Moore-Minor
Community Resources Manager
Metropolitan Development and Housing Agency
Nashville, Tennessee
Smoke-free since 2011

Why did the Metropolitan Development and Housing Agency of Nashville decide to implement a smoke-free policy?

In 2010, our former Executive Director, Phil Ryan, had the idea to initiate a non-smoking policy in our high rises and to provide nonsmoking classes. The initial plan was to have a test property and then implement it at all seven high-rises, but we ended up fast-forwarding the initiative.

How did you engage your residents in the decision to implement a smoke-free policy?

We held a focus group and conducted surveys to gauge how people felt about the policy, whether they were open to trying to quit, and what services we could provide them. We learned that many residents, including people who smoked, did not want their apartments to smell of smoke and were already smoking outside.

Many residents who have family that visit their apartments were already aware of the health effects of secondhand smoke and did not smoke in their apartments.

Describe the services Nashville Metropolitan Development and Housing Agency offered to support residents.

We felt it was our responsibility to support health and cessation services so that people would grow to embrace the whole notion of non-smoking, even if they had smoked for the last 60 years. Many of the residents had smoked most of their lives, ever since they were teenagers. Try telling an 80-year-old woman that she should stop smoking when she started at the age of 14 or 15! This is why we approached this issue with social services at the forefront.



The Nashville Metropolitan Development and Housing Agency has a total of 20 properties with a mix of public housing, including elderly and family properties. All seven high-rise buildings are smoke-free.

Nashville MDHA embraced a wrap-around service approach to its policy implementation, for which MDHA found health partners to provide a range of support services to their residents, many of whom are elderly.



Photo credit: If you choose to reproduce, or modify this photo, we request that you please contact Live Smoke Free.

We launched a non-smoking service fair at our initial test property, where people could sign up for cessation classes, which started shortly thereafter. Those classes went on for a year and a half before the start date of the policy. We used a behavioral modification model for the classes, which was designed by one of our social workers to help people manage or eliminate unhealthy behaviors. We wanted to be able to provide smoking cessation classes, and they were general enough that we could tell people, “OK, you don’t smoke, but is there anything else you want to work on?” Even though the underlying theme of that class was smoking cessation, we wanted to help as many people as possible.

Describe the partners you engaged for this effort.

We had partnerships ranging from the health department, to local clinics and mental health providers. We had home health care providers for folks who were not able to go to a clinic. We also partnered with organizations that provided students to help teach some of the classes. Leveraging partnerships was instrumental in making this happen.

Faye Dodd **Executive Director**

Murray Housing Authority Murray, Kentucky
Smoke-free since 2009

How did you become the first housing authority in Kentucky to go smoke-free?

We had a situation with an elderly resident who was asthmatic or allergic to smoke and lived next door to a smoker. Fair Housing became involved because they wanted her to live next door to a nonsmoker. Of course, we did not screen for that or know who smoked and who didn't. So that kind of sparked the thought that air quality issues can impact your neighbors and that there could be some accommodation issues.

I was first introduced to the idea of smoke-free housing at the 2008 National Association of Housing and Redevelopment Officials (NAHRO) conference. I brought the idea to my board and explained how much money could be saved on turn-around. I have a very supportive board, but it is such a huge change, as we are in the heart of tobacco country. There was concern about what the backlash would be.

Then in the spring of 2009, we had a resident who fell asleep with a cigarette and burned a duplex. The fire swayed us to realize this is about more than air quality; smoking is truly a health and safety hazard. We adopted the policy and it became effective on September 1, 2009.

Were existing residents allowed to continue to smoke indoors?

We grandfathered in current residents until their leases renewed. We chose to grandfather those people so that they could make the decision to leave when their lease renewed. We did not have a mass exodus. Everyone stayed.

Is smoking allowed on the property?

Units have attached porches out front where residents can smoke. They have to pick up their cigarette butts. We've probably had two complaints that I can think of. Someone said that when they have windows open, that someone's smoke on the porch blows into the apartment.



Murray Housing Authority is composed of 206 units that are either duplex or stand alone, with a mix of elderly and family housing.

At the Murray HA, a single staff person, Faye Dodd, proposed and implemented the policy. Ms. Dodd is notable in her Southern tobacco-farm region for her vision of seeing a way to reduce secondhand smoke exposure among residents and accommodate smokers' interests.



How did residents react when you announced the policy?

No one had an issue with it, and I was surprised. I actually think people were thankful that now there wouldn't be smoking in the apartment next door, and their kids would not have to breathe it. It was actually the opposite of what most people would have thought would happen.

We have had several residents say they appreciate it and that they think it's great because they are not breathing smoke from next door.

Have you seen any cost savings?

Yes! We estimate that we are saving \$700 for turning over a three-bedroom unit. We are saving money on paint because less is needed and on labor because less time is needed to turn over a unit.

“We estimate that we are saving \$700 for turning over a three-bedroom unit. We are saving money on paint because less is needed and on labor because less time is needed to turn over a unit.”

- Faye Dodd, Executive Director, Murray Housing Authority

Larry Sisson, President
John Bower, Regional Manager
TESCO Properties
Section 8 Housing across the United States
Smoke-free since 2014

What motivated you to implement a smoke-free policy?

We had three motivators: first, we care about the health of our residents; second, we want our housing to be competitive; and third, we want to reduce our insurance rates.

I noticed that brand new, grade-A properties were being built as smoke-free. The smoke-free trend is what future renters are seeing, and I want our properties to be competitive. We also believe that removing smoking reduces our risk of insurance losses, and ultimately, will reduce our rates. More importantly, the health risk of smoking is well documented, and we want to provide a healthy home for all of our residents.

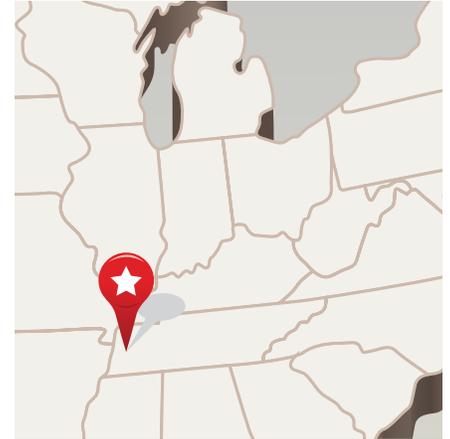
How did your tenants respond to the policy?

It was surprising that the majority of residents had a positive response. At our initial resident meeting, we had mostly non-smokers express that they were very happy with the change. A few of our smokers expressed concerns. The meeting allowed us to explain the policy and address those concerns.

We make the distinction that we are not asking residents to quit smoking. We are just asking them not to smoke inside their apartments or in the building. However, we did have a number of residents quit smoking. The new policy gave them a good reason to say, “You know what? I think it is time I quit.”

Have occupancy rates been affected by the smoke-free policy?

We were concerned that our occupancy rates would drop; but in reality, we saw very little change. We did have a few move because of the new policy; however, we had more applicants seeking a smoke-free environment.



TESCO Properties, based in Germantown, TN, owns and manages approximately 6,000 units in 11 states. All properties in New York, which are high-rises, are 100 percent smoke-free as of January 2014; TESCO plans to convert all of their properties to smoke-free by 2016.



Photo credit: Faribault, Martin & Watonwan Counties Statewide Health Improvement Program.

Did you work with a partner during implementation of the policy? Tobacco-Free New York was involved from the start. They came to our meetings and helped us explain some of the misconceptions the residents had about secondhand smoke in the buildings. Having a third party give tenants information added credibility to what was coming from management.

What is one message that you would tell your counterparts considering implementing this policy?

A smoke-free policy can have a positive impact on your operations.

“We did have a number of residents who quit smoking. The new policy gave them a reason to say, ‘You know what? I think it is time I quit.’”

- Larry Sisson, President
TESCO Properties

Andrea Janis, Senior Property Manager
Heartland Christian Tower
Nashville, Tennessee
Smoke-free since 2013

When a property in a national portfolio adopts a smoke-free policy, it may create a positive ripple effect. The regional vice president carried the idea to management; as a result, National Church Residences recently approved a smoke-free policy and is aiming for full implementation across its nationwide portfolio of 330 communities in 28 states and Puerto Rico. National Church Residences is the nation's largest not-for-profit provider of affordable senior housing. It also provides supportive housing for the disabled and formerly homeless.

What motivated Heartland Christian Tower to implement a smoke-free policy?

The idea of a smoke-free policy originated with the tenants. We began to look into a smoke-free policy and then the HUD notice on how to go smoke-free came out. We put a lot of work into researching it because people were very adamant about wanting to become a smoke-free property.

Following the HUD guidelines, I created letters for people who live in the building and people who were on the waitlist. I surveyed all the tenants to ask if they wanted to go smoke-free and the majority were really gung-ho about it. Then I approached the board with our documentation and research findings, highlighting the pros and cons of going smoke-free, and the number of smokers we have in the building. It was then that the board agreed to implement a smoke-free policy.

How did National Church Residences react to the implementation of a smoke-free policy at your property?

My regional vice president took it upon himself to present it to the National Church corporate level. The corporation implemented a smoke-free policy across the board in November of 2013. They plan to have all owned and/or managed properties go smoke-free.



Heartland Christian Tower is a project-based 202 PRAC property. It is a four-story, 58-unit building for seniors. The property is managed by National Church Residences.



Andrea Janis, Senior Property Manager
(Photo Credit: Staci Bergeron)