How to Create a Smoke-Free Multifamily Housing Policy

Cities across the country are implementing smoke-free policies for multifamily housing. These kinds of successes can serve as a model for a local policy in your area!

Still, implementing these policies can take some groundwork.

Not every city's smoke-free multifamily housing policy will work or look the same. It is important you carefully consider local issues and situations.

Fortunately, policy experts at ChangeLab Solutions have created a Smokefree Housing Ordinance Checklist that covers what you might need to think about as you get started in the issue. Using this guide, as well as the information you have about your town, you will answer questions such as:

- What types of multiunit residences will be smoke-free?
- What types of smoking will be regulated?
- What areas of multiunit residences are smokefree?
- What are some additional provisions for landlords and tenants?
- What are the potential enforcement options?

Be sure to start with the checklist to get prepared!

Examples of Smoke-Free Multifamily Housing Policies

You'll want to check out what other cities are doing. You may be able to largely use what they're already implemented, and tweak it for your local needs.

More than 60 California cities have a 100% smoke-free policy for multifamily housing.

In January 2020, the city of Concord, Calif., adopted a smoke-free multifamily dwelling ordinance in and around multiunit and attached residences. Their definition of multifamily housing includes apartments, attached condominiums, and townhomes. Not only does the ordinance cover interior areas, but exterior ones as well — patios, balconies, decks, and porches. Here is the policy.

In November 2020, the city of Crescent City, Calif., approved a smoke-free policy for multiunit housing to reduce harmful toxins non-smokers face when facing secondhand smoke inside their apartments, condominiums, or other multifamily housing. Here is the policy.

In 2016, Palo Alto, California implemented its own smokefree ordinance. In 2018, the policy officially went into effect. It prohibits smoking "inside multi-unit residences, including associated balconies, porches, decks and patios," Here is the policy.

California's City of El Cerrito passed its Smoking Pollution Protection ordinance, which went into effect in January 2015. It made all the public places, commercial areas, and multi-unit residences within the city completely smoke-free. Here is the policy.

The City of Berkley, Calif., also has a smokefree in multifamily housing ordinance, as well. The policy was originally adopted in December 2013. Since May of the following year, "smoking has been prohibited in 100% of multi-unit housing with two or more units."

When senior-aged residences in an apartment complex in Belmont, Calif., began to get frustrated with having to deal with the toxic fumes coming from their neighbors who smoked, the group band together to form what is reportedly the first smoke-free in multifamily housing policy in the U.S. In 2006, the policy was approved. It is a partial smoke-free policy, prohibiting smoking in units that share at least one common floor or ceiling with another unit.

Model Smoke-Free Multifamily Housing Policies

Existing smoke-free multifamily housing policies in cities can be in-depth and specific based on their location.

A model policy might have benefits of customization.

Here are a few:

The Public Health Law Center and American Lung Association created a model smoke-free ordinance in July 2020.

Policy experts at ChangeLab Solutions provide a well-rounded model policy that can be adapted to meet local needs.

Overall, it aims to:

- Restrict smoking in the indoor and outdoor common areas of all types of multiunit residences, with the option to create designated outdoor smoking areas that meet specific criteria;

- Prohibit smoking inside all units of multiunit residences, including apartments and condominiums; and
- Provide robust enforcement mechanisms, including no-smoking lease terms and options for private individuals and organizations to enforce the smokefree housing provisions.

The US Department of Housing and Urban Development also has its own Smoke-Free Policy publication as well as several Fact Sheets that can make an impact in your work. It provides "tips, real stories and best practices from experienced public housing administrators and owners/agents of multifamily housing."

The American Nonsmokers' Rights Foundation also has a litany of resources that can help you not only implement a smoke-free multifamily housing policy, but other resources for tenants to advocate for smoke-free policies in their multifamily residence.

The American Lung Association's model comes with additional resources that can bolster your action as well. In order to create it, they "worked with experts around the United States to develop this online curriculum on how to implement a smokefree policy in multi-unit housing properties like apartments and condominiums."

Add Local Data and Health Equity into a Smoke-Free Multifamily Housing Policy

Health data can help justify a smoke-free multifamily housing policy.

Learn about the dangers of secondhand smoke, especially for multifamily housing.

Consider looking into disparities in social and health outcomes specific to your city/county, to highlight in the policy. You can gather local information in your community health needs assessment for this information, or download a Health Equity Report Card for your county. In the Report Card, you'll visually see local maps, gauges, and data that reveal the very inequities that are driving health disparities in your community. Data cover air quality, toxin exposure, housing, transportation, education, food, environmental issues, socioeconomic status, and more.