

Six Benefits of Going Smoke-free

Six reasons to adopt a no-smoking policy in your apartment building

PUBLIC HEALTH
HEALTHIER WASHINGTON



Reason #1: Market demand

According to the Healthy Community Environments Survey (2007), Washington renters have a strong preference for smoke-free housing:

- About 86 percent of renters prefer to live in smoke-free housing
- More than 95 percent of non-smokers prefer to live in smoke-free housing
- 54 percent of people who smoke prefer to live in smoke-free housing

In addition, a recent report by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found that 87 percent of Washington residents have a no-smoking rule in their homes—the fourth highest rate in the nation.

Reason #2: Reduce your cleaning and maintenance costs

It can cost an additional \$2,500 or more to turn over a smoking unit. Whether it's the smell, the yellow walls or the burn holes, cleaning up after a smoking tenant is time consuming and costly. Adopting a no-smoking policy will save money on cleaning, painting and repair costs.

Reason #3: Protect your property from fire

In Washington, cigarettes and smoking material are responsible for more deaths than any other fire source. When residential smoking fires occur, they cause more injuries, more deaths and more expensive property damage than other types of residential fires. A no-smoking policy reduces your risk – and may make you eligible for an insurance discount. Ask your broker.

Reason #4: You have the right to adopt a no-smoking policy

It's your right to adopt a comprehensive smoke-free policy—just like you might not allow pets or loud music. Smoking is not protected behavior under any federal, state or local laws. Owners and landlords of multi-unit dwellings have the right to set reasonable rules that protect their investments and the health of their tenants.

Reason #5: Avoid liability

Apartment owners may run an increased risk for legal liability when their property is not designated smoke-free. People with serious breathing disabilities or smoke allergies have legal protection under federal and state laws, including the Americans with Disabilities Act and the Fair Housing Act.

Reason #6: Protect the health of your tenants!

Secondhand smoke exposure is a preventable health hazard. Each year it causes about 3,400 lung cancer deaths and 46,000 heart disease deaths among non-smokers in the U.S. In 2009, the Institute of Medicine released a report finding that secondhand smoke exposure can cause heart attacks. The report also found that smoke-free indoor air laws are an effective way to prevent heart attacks and save lives.

“We believed there was a market for providing a healthy, smoke-free environment in apartment housing. In addition to the health benefits, we can now provide residents with a cleaner, better maintained apartment home, with a reduced fire risk. We see this as an added amenity we can offer to protect the health and safety of our residents.”

Jim Wiard | Senior Vice President of Property Management
Guardian Management LLC

How to Go Smoke-free

Property managers and owners who have implemented no-smoking policies report that they are easy to implement and easy to enforce. Most landlords find that policies can be implemented in four steps:

1. Develop your policy. Be as specific as possible when developing your policy and lease language. Consider including the following:

- Where smoking is and is not allowed (indoors and out)
- Who the policy applies to (tenants, guests, staff, service persons, etc.)
- The definition of smoking
- Effective dates for new and current tenants
- Consequences for violations
- Whether there is a designated outdoor smoking area—preferably 25 feet away from the building and common areas

A policy that covers the whole property will have the biggest impact on reducing cleaning and repair costs, reducing fire risk, and making the building healthier for residents.

2. Communicate the policy. Residents should be made aware of the change with a notification letter, including:

- What the policy covers
- Reasons for the policy (reducing fire risk, improving health, protecting the property, etc.)
- Effective date for the policy
- Resources for quitting smoking such as the free Washington State Tobacco Quit Line ([1-800-QUIT-NOW](tel:1800QUITNOW), www.quitline.com)

Advertise your property as smoke-free for prospective tenants, and clearly explain the policy at lease signing.

3. Implement the Policy. How you implement a no-smoking policy will depend on the type of leases you have in your building.

- **New leases:** Include the policy in all new leases signed on or after the effective date of the no-smoking policy.
- **Current leases:** Add the no-smoking policy when a lease expires, or during lease renewal. The no-smoking clause can be added sooner if a resident voluntarily agrees to a lease change before their lease expires.
- **Month-to-month leases:** Month-to-month leases require 30-days notice before a policy change. The no-smoking policy can go into effect on the first day of the lease term (the day rent is due), 30 days after the resident has received notice.

4. Enforce your policy. You can enforce your no-smoking policy like any other rule:

- Include it in the rental agreement and tell tenants about it during the application process and at move-in
- Post signs and stickers to remind residents and guests of the policy
- Hold tenants financially responsible for smoke-related damage
- Visit the property and perform inspections, and respond promptly to complaints about violations
- Use the same system of warnings, penalties and eviction notices as you do for other rules, like trash removal, pets or rent payment

For more information, or to download sample tenant handouts, lease language, notification letters or warning letters, visit SmokeFreeWashington.com.