

Live Smoke Free

Minnesota's Smoke-Free Multi-Housing program
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Apartment Building Goes Smoke Free In honor of Great American Smoke Out

Twin Cities landlords cite cost savings as reason to go smoke free

The Talheim Apartments building in Chaska, MN, will implement a smoke-free policy for its entire building, including all rental units, on Saturday, November 17, in honor of the Great American Smoke Out. Sheila Knox, building manager, chose to put the smoke-free policy into effect during the Great American Smoke Out as a way to end the secondhand smoke exposure in the building. “The Great American Smoke Out is a day when a lot of people quit smoking. So we’re taking advantage of the event and implementing our smoke-free policy at the same time,” said Knox. “We’ve been preparing to go smoke free since May, and we can’t wait!”

Knox isn’t the only apartment building manager who has made the decision to make her building smoke free. Jodi Childers, Housing Manager for Concordia Arms in Maplewood, is happy with the policy they have had in place since July 1, 2007. “The health and well being of my residents is our top priority. A smoke-free building is safer and contributes to a better living environment,” she said.

Rita Waxon is the Director of Housing for Guardian Angels Senior Housing in Elk River, which has been smoke free since June 2007. “When we allowed smoking, we spent about 5-8 hours of extra cleaning time in each smoked-in unit in order to prepare it for new renters. We also had to pay for additional sealant for the walls and ceiling prior to repainting the units. We are expecting these costs to be eliminated now that we are a smoke-free building,” said Waxon.

Owners and managers of apartment buildings throughout the Twin Cities metro area that haven’t yet gone smoke free are considering the benefits. Toni Powell is Property Manager of Mallard Creek Apartments, a 122-unit building in Golden Valley. “We have had a lot of complaints of smoke traveling from one unit to another, and it is impossible to eliminate this problem which causes health hazards. It is nearly impossible to eliminate the smoky smell when a smoker moves out. We have to replace everything. Also, the possibility of fire is greater with a smoking community, and apartment fires are my worst fear,” said Powell. Mallard Creek Apartments will be smoke free by November 2008.

Many apartment managers decide to go smoke free once they learn that smoke-free apartment buildings are legal. “Smoking is not a protected activity or right, such as voting or marriage, so apartment building owners can designate their entire building or grounds as smoke-free if they want to,” said Warren Ortland, staff attorney at the Tobacco Law Center. “With the increasing public awareness of the health dangers of exposure to secondhand smoke, apartment building owners and landlords may risk more legal problems by continuing to allow smoking on their properties.”

Apartment tenants also like the idea of smoke-free apartment buildings. Lynnette Gyllenblad of Excelsior, who is allergic to secondhand smoke, is looking for a smoke-free building. “I’ve had to move twice this year from apartment units where I was literally smoked out. I am so frustrated because I can’t live in my home without getting sick, even though I’m not allowing anyone to smoke in my unit.”

Smoke migrating into apartments where it is not welcome is a common problem in Minnesota apartment buildings. According to a survey by the Center for Energy and Environment, almost half of the state’s renters stated secondhand smoke comes into their apartment unit from a location outside their apartment unit. Of those with problems, more than one-third of the respondents indicated the smoke bothers them “a lot” or “so much I’m thinking of moving”. The research also shows demand is strong for apartment units that do not smell of other people’s smoke: more than fifty percent of those living in rental apartment units would be “very likely” to choose a smoke-free apartment, all other things being equal.

“Rental property owners are beginning to recognize that there are advantages to meeting this demand,” said Brittany McFadden, Director of Live Smoke Free. “They can have lower cleaning costs, and they don’t have to deal with cigarette burns on carpets and counter tops. Smoke-free policies also reduce the risk of fire and the risk of lawsuits by tenants harmed by secondhand smoke. Owners with smoke-free buildings are overwhelmingly positive about their policy.”

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About Live Smoke Free:

The Live Smoke Free is a program of the Association for Nonsmokers—Minnesota (www.ansrmn.org) that promotes smoke-free policies for apartment buildings in the Twin Cities metro area. In order to increase the number of smoke-free buildings in Minnesota, Live Smoke Free educates building owners, managers, local policy makers, tenants, and housing industry professionals about the benefits of smoke-free buildings. Live Smoke Free assists building owners and managers with creating and promoting a smoke-free policy for their property. The program also assists tenants in finding solutions to secondhand smoke problems. The Association for Nonsmokers—Minnesota has been receiving calls from tenants on this issue for the past ten years, and has had programs addressing this issue since 2004.

Currently, Minnesota tenants seeking smoke-free multi-unit housing largely outnumber the amount of smoke-free units available. Live Smoke Free’s smoke-free apartment building online directory (www.mnsmokefreehousing.org) provides a free advertising opportunity for apartment building owners—with buildings where smoking is prohibited—to promote their smoke-free units. The Live Smoke Free web site also includes information for building owners interested in adopting a smoke-free policy, such as a smoke-free lease addendum. Resources for renters experiencing problems with smoke are also available.

More than 100 apartment buildings in Minnesota are completely smoke free, including all Presbyterian Homes and Serenity Care’s apartment units. In the past few years, thousands of apartment buildings throughout the United States have adopted smoke-free policies, a trend that has grown with the public’s knowledge of the health dangers of secondhand smoke. The local office of the Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) has confirmed that no federal policy prevents adoption of a smoke-free policy for federally subsidized housing. The Minnesota Department of Health states on their website that a property owner or manager has the option of implementing a smoke-free policy which includes individual units.

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About Center for Energy and Environment:

The Center for Energy and Environment (CEE) is a nonprofit organization that promotes the responsible use of natural and economic resources. Distinctive among nonprofits, CEE is staffed by experts in engineering, technical analysis and financing, who apply innovative technical approaches and proven business processes to increase building efficiency, reduce energy costs and ultimately improve occupants' health and safety.

Founded in 1979, CEE offers a full spectrum of energy, environmental and building rehabilitation services designed to improve the lives of business owners, homeowners and tenants. Often provided through partnerships with neighborhood organizations, government agencies and businesses, CEE services include: lighting efficiency, recommissioning (improving a building's overall operating efficiency), indoor air quality assessments, energy-efficiency audits, sound insulation, affordable financing options

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About the Tobacco Law Center:

The Tobacco Law Center (the Center) is a tax-exempt nonprofit corporation affiliated with William Mitchell College of Law. The Center serves as a tobacco prevention and control legal resource center and academic think tank and is funded through consulting contracts and charitable grants. Established in 2000, the Center helps public officials and advocates use the law to improve public health by providing them with objective legal information and technical assistance about issues related to tobacco and health, and by conducting legal and policy research and development. The Center provides assistance with legislative drafting and policy development; legal and policy research, analysis and interpretation; trainings and presentations; development of studies, reports, and educational materials; and preparation of amicus curiae ("friend of the court") legal briefs in significant tobacco litigation. The Center's attorneys serve on several task forces and committees, locally and nationally.

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Secondhand smoke facts:

Secondhand smoke has long been recognized as a cause of lung cancer and heart disease in nonsmokers. In June 2006, the U.S. Surgeon General concluded that the scientific evidence indicates there is no risk-free level of exposure to secondhand smoke. Recently the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommended that persons with heart disease—over twenty percent of the U.S. population—avoid secondhand smoke. Exposure to secondhand smoke is also a known cause of asthma in children and can trigger asthma attacks in both adults and children.