

Impact of Smoke-Free Housing Policies

Insights and Advice for Housing Providers and Managers



An 18-month study by the American Lung Association in Colorado, GASP of Colorado (Group to Alleviate Smoking Pollution), and a team of researchers offers some important insights for housing providers on the benefits of smoke-free policies, implementation and enforcement techniques, and heads of household opinions.

The study involved more than 30 affordable housing buildings in different parts of Colorado before and after they implemented their no-smoking policies. Managers were interviewed to determine the factors associated with adoption, implementation, and enforcement of the policies. In addition, more than 400 heads of household were surveyed to determine their opinions about the policy, health impacts, and changes in smoking behavior.

*This document is available in a brochure format .
(see contact information on page 3)*

Management Interview Findings

- One of the primary reasons for implementing a no-smoking policy is the high cost of turning over a smoke-damaged unit. These repair costs can range from \$5,500 to \$12,000, versus \$500 to \$2,500 for a non-smoking unit.
- A long implementation or making exceptions creates confusion about whether the policy will allow smoking to continue, resentment toward management, and skepticism that the policy will be enforced. Having a short, interim period before full implementation is suggested.
- Hold community meetings with residents; get expert advice and assistance; become more educated about the issue; post signage; and continue communications about the policy after implementation. Lease agreements need to spell out policy provisions, and the consequences of violations should be verbally described to residents and included in lease agreements.

Participating Communities Pre — to Post-Policy Phase

Rangely Housing Authority
South Metro Housing Options, Littleton

Post-Policy Phase *(In effect five years)*

Boulder Housing Authority
Fort Collins Housing Authority
The Villages, Fort Collins

Head-of-Household Survey Findings

- There is strong support for no-smoking policies. Ninety percent of survey respondents support no-smoking policies (including about three-quarters of smokers) and say that living in a no-smoking building is an important determinant when choosing a place to live.
- There was some confusion about the extent of the policy as to where smoking is prohibited. The long implementation or making temporary exceptions, that continued to allow people to smoke, likely contributed to the confusion.
- A quarter of respondents indicated that the no-smoking policy is enforced always, and 42% said there was a safe way to report violations. When signage is prominent, a higher percentage (57.5%) of respondents reported seeing the no-smoking signs.
- It was reported that the most common places of secondhand-smoke exposure were entryways, stairs, hallways, balconies, from other units, and from outdoor sources. Once policies went into effect, exposure from outdoor sources and entryways was more common. Almost half of all respondents said that drifting tobacco smoke bothered them.

- The most common health issues associated with exposure to secondhand smoke reported by nonsmoking respondents included: allergies, nasal congestion, eye irritation, headaches, and breathing problems. These health problems declined after policy implementation.
- Smoking habits changed. At the beginning of the pre-policy phase, 51.7% of smokers were considering quitting smoking. After the policy was fully implemented, 66.7% of smokers quit or were smoking less.



Important Implementation and Compliance Actions for Housing Providers

- A policy implementation period should be limited to three to six months and never more than one year. This period should be used to educate residents and staff, allow residents who smoke time to quit smoking and comply with the policy, or allow time to move.
- Continually communicate with residents, staff and visitors to promote compliance. This is especially important when the weather changes. Wintertime increases the likelihood of exposure to tobacco smoke from indoor sources. Summertime increases exposure from outdoor sources when windows are opened and people who smoke are more likely to “take it outside.”
- Provide stop-smoking resources like the Colorado Quitline at 1-800-QUIT-NOW, tobaccofreeco.org or coquitmobile.org. Use communication tools to acknowledge residents who quit smoking and allow them to share their success stories.
- No-smoking signs should be placed at all building entrances and throughout the property, including hallways, common rooms such as laundries, gymnasiums, card rooms, unit doors, etc.
- A safe and confidential means for reporting violations should be made known to residents and staff. Designated smoking areas should be at least 25 feet away from all buildings, doors, window openings, and air intakes.
- Some respondents in this study continued to complain about being exposed to secondhand smoke from various sources. A strong enforcement protocol could help minimize those problems. Housing providers and managers might consider a 100% smoke-free policy for the entire property, as these policies may be easier for residents to understand and for management to enforce.
- A smoke-free policy leads to healthier residents. Over a 12-month period from before policy implementation to after, head-of-household surveys indicated that nearly all of their health problems associated with exposure to secondhand smoke declined, and many residents who smoked either quit smoking or reduced their smoking. Smoking remains the leading cause of preventable disease and death in the U.S.



Colorado Web Resources

MySmokeFreeHousing.org

All Your Smoke-Free Housing Resources Under One Roof

- Tips on how to implement a policy
- Sample leases and resident surveys
- HUD toolkits and memos
- Enforcement tips, free signage
- Links to other web resources
- Health information about secondhand tobacco and marijuana smoke

MySmokeFreeHousing.com

- Lists thousands of multiunit residential buildings and properties in Colorado with no-smoking policies
- Offers a free listing to publicize your buildings

SmokeFreeColorado.org

- Provides information about the Colorado Clean Indoor Air Act
- Free signage and other materials can be ordered



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The American Lung Association in Colorado, with public funds from the Tobacco Education, Prevention and Cessation Grant Program provided by Amendment 35. ALAC is the leading organization working to save lives by improving lung health and preventing lung disease through education, advocacy and research.

Visit us at lung.colorado.org.

The Group to Alleviate Smoking Pollution (GASP of Colorado) is a nonprofit organization working to eliminate secondhand smoke from the air we breathe by advocating for smoke-free policies at work, in public places, and in multiunit housing.

Visit us at gaspforair.org.

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