



Maintaining Your Smoke-Free Policy

Tobacco use and dependence are chronic issues that will need to be addressed on an ongoing basis. When you implement a policy, it is unrealistic to expect all tenants to immediately stop smoking in their units. Your staff must be committed to compassionate enforcement. You can show that enforcement of this policy is important by making it a discussion point at every staff meeting and in communications to staff members.

Property managers observe similar patterns in tenant behavior, attitude, and response after a smoke-free policy goes into effect. Below are common observations during the first year and the actions that successful smoke-free pioneers recommend to help you stay on track.

What You May Experience

Immediately After Your Policy Becomes Effective

- People who smoke complain.
- Tenant champions offer enthusiastic support.

Recommended Actions

- Announce smoking cessation classes or other ways to support people who want to quit.
- Reinforce tenants' knowledge of areas in which smoking is allowed.
- Thank tenants when you see them complying with the policy. Publicly acknowledge tenants who are doing the right thing by highlighting them as Smoke-Free Heroes on posters and flyers.
- Follow up on all complaints and do not ignore violations.

After 3–6 Months

- Complaints are usually weather dependent.
- Tenants' vocal support and enthusiasm begins to wane.
- Things quiet down; there are regular violators; tenants are quiet except when they complain about the people who smoke. You may receive more complaints when the weather is extreme.
- Requests for reasonable accommodation by people with disabilities may be received.

Recommended Actions

- Continue to communicate about the policy. Celebrate small successes in newsletter stories or other communications. Continue to thank Smoke-Free Heroes.
- Highlight stories of tenants who changed their smoking behavior or quit.
- Meet with tenants who resist complying with the policy.
- Enforce the policy fairly, uniformly, and with compassion.
- Announce smoking cessation classes or other ways to support people who want to quit.
- Address every request for reasonable accommodation on a case-by-case basis according to your policies. Smoking is not a protected behavior, and smoking inside a public housing unit is not a reasonable accommodation.
- Announce and host cessation classes. Provide information on how to quit smoking or modify their smoking behaviors so they can smoke less often.

After 6–12 Months

- Tenant complaints make enforcement feel challenging.
- Enforcement process is tested. Although housing providers do not like the idea of pursuing an eviction, at this point there may be a tenant with multiple violations.

Recommended Actions

- Management and staff members need to talk about staying focused and to be diligent and consistent in enforcement. Remind staff members this is a culture change that takes adaptation; there is no quick solution.
- As you get complaints, collect evidence of violations. Track your fair and consistent multistep enforcement process.
- Continue to schedule and attend tenant meetings to build support for the policy. Ask tenants for help with peer-to-peer encouragement.
- Announce smoking cessation classes or other ways to support people who want to quit.

First-Year Anniversary

- A culture of healthy living led by staff members and tenant champions encourages compliance.
- News about issued violations gets around; tenants realize the consequences are real and seek help with behavior modification if they are worried about being able to comply.