

Smoke-Free Environments Law Project

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Smoke-Free Multi-Unit Housing in Michigan & the Nation: A Decade of Enormous Growth

"As the first decade of the 21st century ends, we find that the growth in Michigan and nationally in smoke-free multi-unit housing has been enormous – going from virtually no smoke-free housing in 2000 to many hundreds of thousands of units today," according to Jim Bergman, Co-Director of The Center for Social Gerontology, Inc. in Ann Arbor, Michigan, which operates the Smoke-Free Environments Law Project (SFELP).

"In 2000, it was virtually impossible to find apartment or condominium buildings that were smoke-free in all the living units, as well as the common areas. This was true in Michigan and in almost every state in the nation. By 2005, a number of states, including Michigan, Maine, Minnesota, and California had begun to develop a growing supply of smoke-free apartments. By the end of the decade, virtually every state has smoke-free multi-unit housing available, and many states have thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of smoke-free units," said Bergman.

Smoke-free multi-unit housing is fast-becoming the "hot" new amenity in Michigan rental housing, as well as across the country. Hundreds of thousands of market-rate rental housing units are now covered by no-smoking policies. Both the National Apartment Association and the National Multi Housing Council in 2008 issued policy memoranda to their members stating that smoke-free policies are legal in all states and make good business sense, as well as being good for their resident's health.

In public housing, funded by the federal Department of Housing & Urban Development (HUD) and other federal and state entities, the growth in smoke-free housing has been equally as great, if not greater. In 2000, there were only two public housing authorities in the nation that had smoke-free policies for some or all their buildings (Kearney, NE and Fort Pierce, FL). By the end of 2003, just eleven housing authorities had smoke-free policies. By January, 2005, that number had only risen to fifteen. But, then the growth

sky-rocketed. As of December, 2009, at least 136 public housing authorities in 19 states had adopted smoke-free policies for some or all their buildings. The growth in the entire decade was 6700%; since December, 2003, the growth was 1136%; and the growth in the past 5 years has been over 800%.

In Michigan, the Cadillac Housing Commission was the first public housing authority to adopt a smoke-free policy, doing so in July, 2005. Today, thirty-two local Michigan housing commissions have adopted smoke-free policies, covering about 56 apartment buildings/developments and over 60 townhouses/scattered site units, with about 4,158 apartment units. That is a 3100% increase in the 48 months since January, 2006.

The increase in smoke-free policies in other "affordable" housing, funded by HUD, other governmental entities or by tax subsidies has been just as dramatic. In Michigan alone, there are now over 20,000 units of affordable housing, in addition to the 4,158 units of public housing. These include apartment buildings owned by for-profit and non-profit entities all across the state. Many other states are seeing the same type of growth.

In July, 2009, HUD issued a Notice to public housing authorities in which they explicitly "strongly encouraged" them to adopt smoke-free policies for some or all their housing. The HUD Notice put the federal housing agency on record as saying smoke-free policies are good for health of residents, but also save money for housing authorities.

Many of the smoke-free Michigan apartments can be located by going to SFELP's MISmokeFreeApartment.org listing at <http://www.MISmokeFreeApartment.org/listing.html> To access the national listing of smoke-free public housing authorities go to <http://www.tcsg.org/sfelp/SFHousingAuthorities.pdf>

Smoke-Free Apartments Are Legal & Good Business

While Michigan is one of the pace-setters in the nation in the realm of smoke-free multi-unit housing, this is a national trend, as well. Until the MISmokeFreeApartment initiative began in mid-2004, most apartment owners in Michigan thought it was against the law to make their apartment buildings smoke-free and include no-smoking clauses in their rental leases. Once owners realized it was legal to make their apartments totally smoke-free, they began to transition their buildings to smoke-free status. Initiatives in other states have produced similar results.

"Apartment owners understand the high maintenance costs associated with having smokers in their units, including cigarette burn marks, nicotine and tar-stained walls, and carpets that reek of tobacco smoke. Smoke-free policies dramatically reduce maintenance costs when smokers move out and their apartment units have to be refurbished for new tenants. The cost savings can be \$2,000 to \$8,000 per unit," Bergman said. Owners also know the dangers of cigarette-caused fires. Plus, now that only about 20% of adults smoke, owners see that the market niche for smoke-free apartments is enormous.

Smoke-Free Housing is the Norm & Residents Want It

Resident surveys by Michigan apartment owners reflect what surveys in Minnesota, California, Maine and elsewhere have found: a sizeable majority of apartment residents greatly prefer smoke-free apartment buildings. At least 75% to 80% of residents in most apartments surveyed say they want smoke-free housing, and over half say they have moved or would move if secondhand tobacco smoke seeped into their unit from adjoining units.

According to the Michigan Adult Tobacco Survey, in 2005 over 80% of households surveyed said they had a smoke-free policy in their own home; that percentage is increasing yearly. Apartment residents are saying that they don't want their smoke-free home/unit inundated with their neighbor's secondhand smoke. And, many smokers feel the same way and take their smoking outside to protect their families and their furniture.

2000 to 2010: A Decade of Exponential Growth in Smoke-Free Multi-Unit Housing

Bergman concluded by saying: "In 2000, virtually no one was even talking about smoke-free multi-unit housing. By the middle of the decade, a few states, including Michigan, were taking the lead in encouraging apartment and condo owners to adopt smoke-free policies. By the beginning of 2010, smoke-free multi-unit housing is everywhere and growing by the week. Few changes in societal norms or business practices have been as rapid or as dramatic as the trend to smoke-free multi-unit housing. This is one of the bright spots in a decade that has seen too much tragedy and economic loss."

To access the MISmokeFreeApartment web site to learn more, go to <http://www.mismokefreeapartment.org> To access the Michigan smoke-free apartment listing directly, go to <http://www.mismokefreeapartment.org/listing.html> For more on smoke-free apartments, go to the SFELP "Apartments" site at <http://www.tcsg.org/sfelp/apartment.htm> which also has links to related sites in other states.

The MI Smoke-Free Apartment Initiative is a partnership of local health departments, the Tobacco Section of the Michigan Department of Community Health, and the Smoke-Free Environments Law Project of The Center for Social Gerontology, Inc.