



POAH

# PRESERVATION OF AFFORDABLE HOUSING



## Affordable Housing Providers Who Adopt No Smoking Policies Can Save Lives and Money

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By implementing No Smoking policies in their developments, affordable housing providers can help residents lead healthier lives with the added bonus of lowering the property's insurance rates. POAH is joining a growing number of affordable housing owners, including more than 230 housing authorities in 27 states, that have already implemented No Smoking policies in some or all of their buildings. A reasonable accommodation request at one building impacted by second hand smoke moving through the air ducts and accidental fires started by cigarettes in three additional POAH properties have prompted us to implement a no-smoking policy in five properties in five states with the hopes of broadening the policy to the entire portfolio by the spring of 2012.

### Health Concerns

People in multi-unit housing are more likely to be exposed to the health hazards of second-hand smoke, a major public health concern. In multi-family buildings, second-hand smoke poses a unique threat as it can drift from one unit or balcony to the next and enter through doors, windows, ventilation systems, plumbing penetrations, and even electrical outlets. Second-hand smoke is particularly hazardous indoors, where it is usually more concentrated and has higher levels of toxins. There are more than 69 toxins in second-hand smoke that cause cancer, according to the National Cancer Institute at the National Institutes of Health. Each year, nearly 3,000 lung cancer deaths occur among adult non-smokers as a result of exposure to second-hand smoke. And an estimated 46,000 deaths occur from heart disease in non-smokers who live with smokers. Children exposed to second-hand smoke are at increased risk of sudden infant death syndrome, ear infections, colds, pneumonia, bronchitis, and more severe asthma.

For adults, obesity and tobacco use are the main contributors to premature illness, death, and health care costs – and they have a disproportionate impact on low income communities because more than a third of adults who live below the poverty level smoke as compared to less than 20 % of adults who live above the poverty level.

### Fire Risk

In addition to the health effects, smoking is the leading cause of fire death in the United States. Fires caused by smoking are costly, deadly, and leave many people with damaged property or homeless. Ironically, one in four (24%)

victims who die in residential smoking-related fires is not the smoker whose cigarette started the fire, according to a National Fire Protection Association study.

Fires can start on decks and porches as well as in units. In the past two years, fires in three POAH properties related to smoking have resulted in emergency evacuations and extensive damage to 38 units that required major renovations. The most recent incident caused residents, many of them elderly, to be evacuated in the middle of the winter following a fire caused by a burning cigarette left behind by a personal healthcare assistant. Some residents were not able to return to their units until late March. Another recent incident, caused by a smoker who threw a cigarette into a trash can, destroyed a 12-unit building and forced 22 residents to find temporary housing for 16 months. Estimates of property damage at POAH communities as a result of recent fires run as high as \$2.9 million.

### New Policy

We believe that a program of education and enforcement will help our residents quit smoking and create a healthier living environment for everyone – residents, staff and visitors alike. We also anticipate that when the portfolio is No Smoking, fewer residents will be exposed to the traumatic loss of their possessions and we will be able to redirect funds from our insurance premiums to other activities with a direct effect on the residents or our stewardship of the properties.

Effective August 1st of this year, new tenants at our five pilot sites will be required to sign the updated House Rules which explains the No Smoking policy. Current tenants will be required to sign an updated House Rules in these communities during their lease renewal process. The No Smoking policy will cover all individual units and all common areas. At each property, there will be designated locations (such as a gazebo or other gathering spot) for smoking, which residents, staff and guests may use. Smokers are always welcome to live in POAH communities, but will need to limit their smoking to the designated locations. POAH will also offer smoking cessation assistance.

The time is clearly here for No Smoking policies to be adopted in affordable housing developments across the country. The long term benefits are significant financially and most importantly, in saving lives.

*Preservation Housing Management manages 6,515 units in POAH's portfolio.*