

Results of the 2013 North Carolina Affordable Multi-Unit Housing Survey

In 2013, the N.C. Division of Public Health and the Carolina Survey Research Laboratory at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill conducted a survey about smoke-free policies in affordable multi-unit housing. We found that smoke-free policies are a growing and beneficial trend.

Survey information

We sent the survey to all multi-unit properties in North Carolina subsidized by Rural Development, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development, and the N.C. Housing Finance Agency. A total of 1,063 properties completed surveys, for a response rate of 57 percent.

Housing managers report positive experiences with smoke-free policies

Implementation and enforcement of smoke-free policies went smoothly at most properties. While housing managers and owners may have concerns about losing revenue, dealing with lawsuits, or spending increased time and resources enforcing smoke-free policies, these concerns were not a problem for most respondents. Here are a few key results:

- ⇒ There was **no difference in occupancy rate** between smoke-free and smoking-allowed properties.
- ⇒ Most (85%) properties that converted to smoke-free said that **staff time devoted to smoking-related issues decreased or stayed the same** after the policy went into effect.
- ⇒ **Half of properties reported no violations** to their smoke-free policies. Most (81%) properties with violations detected them through routine inspections, suggesting that detecting violations was not a burden at most properties.
- ⇒ **Legal actions to enforce smoke-free policies were rarely needed.** Of the properties surveyed, only three reported filing summary ejectment complaints (evictions) to enforce their smoke-free policies. All of these evictions were upheld in court.



A smoke-free DHIC property in Raleigh.
Image credit: Sally Haile

Smoke-free policies are a growing trend

- ⇒ In 2013, **16.5 percent of affordable housing properties in North Carolina banned smoking** in all residential units.
- ⇒ **A quarter** of smoking-allowed properties were considering converting to smoke-free.
- ⇒ In 2014, following this survey, two companies took their portfolios smoke-free, bringing smoke-free affordable housing in the state **from 16.5 percent to at least 28 percent** in one year's time.



Smoking-related fire destroys a Landura Management Associates property.
Image credit: Scott Alderman

Smoking-related costs add up

- ⇒ **Smoking-related fires were costly.** Smoking-related fires occurred at four percent of all properties in the 36 months before the survey. While some smoking-related fires were small and did not cause damage, other fires cost thousands, including one fire that cost a half million dollars.
- ⇒ **Turnover costs were higher in smoking-allowed units.** Properties that allowed smoking estimated that the average turnover costs for smoking-allowed units were \$374.74 higher than for smoke-free units.

Considering going smoke-free? Tips from smoke-free housing managers

We asked managers to share the lessons they learned about implementing and enforcing smoke-free policies. They said:

Smoke-free policies have many benefits, including:

- ⇒ Improving the appearance of the property;
- ⇒ Promoting residents' and staff's health and safety; and
- ⇒ Lower turnover and maintenance costs.

The positives outweigh the negatives. As one manager said,

“Change can be hard for any property. But if it's beneficial to the resident[s] as well as the property, it is well worth it.”

To enforce the policy effectively, managers should:

- ⇒ Allow an adequate amount of time before implementing the policy;
- ⇒ Clearly state the policy at move-in and in the lease;
- ⇒ Be patient with residents as they adjust to the new policy, but enforce the policy firmly and consistently;
- ⇒ Frequently remind residents about the policy; and
- ⇒ Provide smoking cessation resources.

Visit the NC Smoke-Free Housing Website at www.smokefreehousingnc.com to learn more about other properties that have gone smoke-free.