

Wish you could go smoke free?

If you have been contemplating going smoke-free in your apartment building, you are not alone. Towns and municipalities across the nation are enacting or drawing up regulations to support that move, as numerous apartment owners adjust leases to institute non-smoking policies. Even the mayor of New York is pressing landlords and developers to ban smoking inside multiunit residential buildings.

Anti-smoking policies typically cannot be implemented in existing buildings without a change to the lease agreement, which means adopting a ban would likely have to be achieved in stages—for example, all new leases would carry the ban, and all existing leases would have to be rewritten as they come up for renewal. It is a best practice, if not the law, that you give residents substantial forewarning about the upcoming change so they can make arrangements for moving if they don't want to abide by the new rules.

It is a good idea to explain why you are instituting a no-smoking policy and to cover all it encompasses—including marijuana, pipes, cigars and whatever else you are going to bar. The benefits of a ban accrue to you and them, so consider how you can present the change in a positive light. If you are going to mention the cost savings for your complex from reduced window washing, carpet cleaning, repainting, etc., you might ready yourself for questions about how you will pass on those savings to residents.

There obviously is a reduction in your exposure to fires as well, so check with your insurer to see if there are any premium savings associated with going smoke-free.

In New York, the mayor is urging commercial residential complexes to declare and publish a smoking policy, whatever it may be. In non-smoking apartments and condominiums, property managers need to learn the details of their responsibility in enforcing such bans. If a resident violates the policy, what is the property manager, owner, or condo board to do?

If you want to take immediate steps to improve air quality and reduce contamination from smoking, there are actions you can take. For instance, you might hire an interior environmental contractor to recommend air-filtration upgrades, or you might sponsor smoking-cessation classes as part of your community activities agenda. Additionally, talk to peers in the multifamily residential housing industry to hear how they have implemented no-smoking policies. You will hear what works and doesn't work and find some pointers to discuss with your leadership, staff and residents. If you have tips to share, let us hear them here. Your experiences could help an industry colleague promote healthier living and a safer residential complex.

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