

11 LAKE AVE. NEWSLETTER

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The Challenge of Being a Smoke-Free Community

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Several years ago the WHA became one of the first housing authorities in the state to designate all of their properties "Smoke-Free". This was a monumental moment as we were striving to improve the health of all of our residents from the dangers of direct smoking and second hand smoke. Being smoke-free meant that residents would not be permitted to smoke inside their apartments or in any common areas in their building. This included the smoking of marijuana, not just nicotine cigarettes. For residents that wanted to continue to smoke, the WHA designated smoking areas that were usually 30 – 50 feet away from the building. In addition, we offered residents smoking cessation services in their own building, through a generous grant we received from CVS Pharmacy and the City of Worcester. Unfortunately, very few residents took advantage of the cessation resources.

Issues with enforcement

Since the implementation of this policy, the WHA Housing Managers have had a tremendously difficult time enforcing it. We have residents that continue to smoke inside their apartments and when questioned, they simply deny it. On a few occasions, the staff has been able to catch smoking violators but since we are not in the buildings 24 hours a day, it becomes a challenge to ensure residents are not smoking. We receive numerous complaints from non-smoking residents that the WHA needs to do more. The feedback is that our current enforcement policies are not working and many residents believe that smoking inside the apartments is actually getting worse. Hearing these statements makes me very concerned.

Smoke Detection Devices

I recently became aware of a detection device that several housing authorities are using as a way to detect and prove if residents are smoking inside their apartment. The devices look like a standard smoke alarm, are vandal-proof, and would be installed by a

WHA staff person. The device uses a patented PolySens® technology for real time detection of hazardous airborne chemicals. Once the device is installed inside the apartment, it will provide constant monitoring and immediately detect if smoking is occurring in the apartment. The information will be sent to the WHA for follow up action.

There are several housing authorities, some local, which are utilizing this technology and have found it to be very beneficial. I have decided to start a pilot program here at the WHA to see how effective these devices are and if they can help reduce the smoking inside apartments. I am very worried about the health and safety of the residents, especially those that are not smokers and subject to second hand smoke.

Pilot Program

We will implement this pilot program at several developments and depending on the results, I will then decide if we add it to all of our properties. More details will follow on the specifics of the device and implementation, but I wanted to make all of you aware that the WHA is troubled by the increase of smoking in apartments and we are exploring every option to make your community a safe and smoke-free one.

For the residents that are following the smoking rules, I would like to thank you. It is very much appreciated. For residents that smoke and would like to quit, please speak with your primary doctor for cessation information and resources. For residents that are violating the No Smoking Policy and continue to smoke inside their apartments, I strongly urge you to stop in order to avoid lease enforcement that could ultimately cause you to be evicted. No one, certainly not me, wants to evict anyone for smoking, but it is important that we enforce the rules, especially when it impacts the health and safety of others.

Thank you.