



More multi-family buildings in N.J. are going smoke-free

Published: Wednesday, September 21, 2011, 8:00 AM Updated: Wednesday, September 21, 2011, 11:44 AM

Sarah Portlock / The Star-Ledger

By

Sarah Portlock / The Star-Ledger

ATLANTIC CITY — It's against the law in New Jersey to smoke in common areas of residential buildings, but property managers are increasingly turning their complexes completely smoke-free because of the health and financial benefits.

Nearly two dozen public and private housing properties prohibit smoking in private areas throughout the state, according to the Global Advisors for Smokefree Policy, or GASP. And there is momentum for more, said speakers on a panel Tuesday in Atlantic City about smoke-free multifamily buildings.

The discussion was part of the two-day Governor's Conference on Housing and Economic Development.

"This is truly an emerging trend in housing," said Karen Blumenfeld, executive director of GASP, which is based in Summit.

The New Jersey Smoke-free Air Act prohibits smoking in common areas like hallways, lobbies and stairwells, and requires smokers to stand away from doors and windows to prevent smoke from wafting in. Places like college dorms, nursing homes and foster or adoptive family houses are also smoke-free under the law.



Laurent Fiefet/AFP/Getty Images

Large ashtrays like this are disappearing from multi-family housing complexes across New Jersey as more comprehensive smoking bans are getting implemented.

"There was virtually no resistance," he said.

On Dec. 1, 2010, the Bellmawr Senior Housing Association prohibited smoking in its two senior housing buildings in the South Jersey town.



Tyler Barrick/The Star-Ledger

A student walks through the campus of County College of Morris, which became the first smoke-free college in New Jersey in 2007. Now some multi-family housing complexes are instituting complete smoking bans.

The benefits to going smoke-free are extensive, said property managers who have made the switch — there are lower maintenance costs because no one has to clean up cigarette butts, faster turnaround times on available units because smoke residue isn't stuck in wall paint and carpets, decreased fire and damage risks, and the opportunity for reduced insurance costs.

"By and large, everyone likes it — it keeps the hallways cleaner, it smells better," said Steve Tancer, director of property management and operations for RPM Development Group in Montclair. Seven of RPM's 25 properties are smoke-free, including buildings in Newark, Somerset and Orange.

One concern is whether smokers feel discriminated, but Tancer said they didn't find that to be the case.

When residents' leases were up for renewal, new lines in the contract included the no-smoking policy. Of the two buildings' 130 units, 20 tenants were smokers, said Michele Aquilante, who works for the association.

"They have not refused to sign, (but) a few have chosen to leave," said Aquilante.

The complex also offers education and resources to help residents quit smoking. Aquilante and a colleague, Lisa Falcone, both former smokers, said they have noticed quite a few tenants have quit.

"We love them like our grandparents, and we want to take care of them," Falcone said.

Related coverage:

- **Community colleges in N.J. are cutting back on smoking**
- **Atlantic City reconsiders casino smoking ban**
- **Greystone hospital smoking ban causes significant drop in heavy-smoking patients**

© 2011 NJ.com. All rights reserved.