

The Inquirer

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Gallery: PHA smoking ban has soft rollout on first day

Smoking is now officially prohibited at Courtyard Apartments at Riverview, a public housing complex on South Fourth Street in Queen Village.

Or that's the rule on paper. A ban on smoking on Philadelphia Housing Authority property went into effect Wednesday, but for at least two housing complexes, it was off to a slow start.

At Courtyard, property managers were still discussing how the prohibition against smoking would work. They have notified residents about the change, but they have not yet set up a designated zone for smoking outside, as required under the policy.

Residents, meanwhile, were surprised to hear that the ban was already in place.

The delay stems from the logistical challenges of enforcing the ban, said Darrell Williams, a property manager who oversees the complex.

Partly a response to federal pressure, the policy prohibits smoking in all of Philadelphia's public housing units and on almost all housing agency property, affecting about 30,000 tenants.

Courtyard includes 470 housing units, 165 for seniors and 305 townhouses, and has about 1,100 residents near Fourth and Washington Avenue. Developing an effective plan to police smoking in all of them will require consulting with attorneys and the Housing Authority, Williams said, before meeting with residents. They aren't at that point yet.

"We're keeping in mind that we need to enforce it fairly across all homes," Williams said. "That's going to be tricky."

At Spring Garden Apartments, at 715 Brandywine St. in North Philadelphia, residents were similarly confused.

Tenant Jason Goode, 36, said he had not even heard of the ban. He doesn't smoke, but suggested that his neighbors are probably in the dark, too.

"I don't think they know," he said late Wednesday morning. "If you run into someone who smokes, they'll probably be as oblivious as I was."

A Spring Garden property manager said the ban had come up at resident meetings. But acknowledging that he was unclear on some details, he referred reporters to a PHA spokeswoman.

Nichole Tillman, the spokeswoman, wrote in an e-mail that the Housing Authority is "committed to continued collaboration with residents and resident leadership to achieve a smooth transition to a smoke-free environment."

She cited resident task forces and communication with property managers as part of that effort.

Still, Williams said, PHA has yet to give Courtyard much guidance on how best to implement the policy. Housing complexes, he said, are probably looking to each other for tips on how to proceed.

"It's such a major change," Williams said. "There are a lot of other people out there waiting to see what others do."

http://www.philly.com/philly/news/20150806_PHA_smoking_ban_has_a_soft_rollout_on_its_first_day.html#fvevFp08zmFKZSRL.99