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Albany Housing Authority bans smoking in all units

Albany

Albany Housing Authority apartments and homes will be smoke-free as of Jan. 1, its board of commissioners voted on Tuesday.

The new policy covers all 2,200 units. Smokers will have to be 25 feet away from the property to have a cigarette, said **Steve Longo**, the Housing Authority's executive director.

He said the measure is being taken to protect the health of residents who do not want to be exposed to secondhand smoke, which has been linked to serious lung and other medical conditions. Housing Authority units were built four decades ago or more, and they share a common ventilation system.

"The smoke-free policy makes affordable housing both safe and healthy," said **Judy Rightmyer**, director of the **Capital District Tobacco-Free Coalition**. "It's going to decrease the amount of fires, and also, for their health, it decreases the amount of secondhand smoke."

Mayor **Kathy Sheehan** applauded what she called "a victory for people who want to live in a smoke-free environment and have not been able to."

"We know smoking causes health issues, and 4 in 10 people living in public housing are children," the mayor said. "This will certainly help them."

She noted in response to those who may ask, "Why not let people decide what to do in their own homes?" that banning smoking is a

trend in both market-rate and government-subsidized housing complexes.

Unlike the phased-in smoke-free program launched in Schenectady two years ago, which was initially implemented only in housing units for seniors, the Albany Housing Authority is instituting the policy in all its units at once, Longo said. Recent surveys from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development show that phased-in programs have been less successful, he said.

Statewide, 34 housing authorities, also including those in Hoosick Falls and Gloversville, have implemented full or partial smoke-free policies in their residences, according to the Tobacco-Free Coalition.

In implementing the policy, Longo said, Albany Housing Authority staff will go door to door, beginning next week, to inform residents of the program and to connect smokers to programs that could help them quit, he said. Literature on smoking-cessation programs and devices like nicotine patches will be available in lobbies. Longo, a former smoker himself, said he understands the power of nicotine addiction.

"I've had a lifelong challenge," he said.

Longo does not believe the policy will make it difficult for low-income people who are unwilling or unable to quit smoking to find housing.

"Society pretty much has come to smoking outdoors," he said. "The majority of the private apartment complexes in the Capital District, you have to go outside to smoke."

Albany parks have been tobacco-free since Jan. 1.

"People can breathe easy in Albany's public parks," council member **Dorcey Applyrs** said, "and now they can breathe easy in the Albany's public housing."

Applyrs, who sponsored the legislation for tobacco-free city parks, said studies have shown some of the highest hospitalization rates for asthma in Albany are in the South End, where a large proportion of AHA housing is located.

<http://www.timesunion.com/local/article/Albany-Housing-Authority-going-smoke-free-6438230.php>