



Press Release

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Maine Housing requires secondhand smoke protection for low-income tenants

Maine becomes first state in nation to require protection of tenants from secondhand smoke in new units

Augusta- Maine Housing has decided that all future units built and financed by the state's Low Income Housing Tax Credit will be required to be 100% smoke-free. Smoke-free apartments benefit both tenants and landlords. The Maine State Housing Authority (Maine Housing) has recognized that allowing smoking inside of buildings can cause tenants to suffer illness and poor health and that the cost of rehabbing a unit is a waste of money since the damage is preventable.

"Creating and maintaining 100% smoke-free multi-unit buildings are a proven cost-savings strategy for all involved. Research in Maine and across the country found that landlord changeover expenses for smoke-free apartments are 5-10 times less expensive than units that allow smoking. This is equivalent to thousands of dollars per unit at turnover - a substantial savings," Smoke-Free Housing Coalition of Maine Coordinator Sarah Mayberry remarked.

When Maine Housing and the Governor adopted the 2013 Qualified Allocation Plan (QAP), they made Maine the first state in the nation to require that all projects funded by Maine Housing's QAP protect their residents from secondhand smoke by being 100% smoke-free. Maine Housing's QAP, the state's Low Income Housing Tax Credit (LIHTC) program application, is released each year, describing how applicants will qualify for the highly competitive LIHTCs allocated by Maine Housing. The 2013 QAP requires that all applicants have a written 100% non-smoking policy in all units and common areas as a threshold requirement, rather than a scoring incentive.

For the past five years, Maine Housing has included a one-point incentive in the plan for applicants who chose to create a 100% smoke-free building. In those years, all but one applicant chose to create a 100% smoke-free policy. "This high level of volunteer participation demonstrates the willingness and commitment of QAP applicants to create fire-safe, cost-efficient buildings which save taxpayers and owners money in the short and long-term. We applaud Maine Housing's commissioners and staff for recognizing this fact and implementing this policy as a requirement of QAP applicants," says Tina Pettingill, Smoke-Free Housing Coalition of Maine Chair.

One hundred percent smoke-free policies protect tenants and property by reducing the risk of fire. Cigarettes are a main source of fire death in Maine and the cause of multiple fires each year in multi-unit rentals, costing owners thousands of dollars and tenants to be displaced. Creating a 100% smoke-free environment within a multi-unit building can also result in significant property-casualty insurance savings. Many insurance companies consider a 100% smoke-free policy as part of a comprehensive fire-safe policy and will offer policy premium savings for owners.

"Secondhand smoke exposure in multi-unit housing is a major health issue for everyone but especially those with chronic illnesses like asthma and lung disease," states Ed Miller, Vice President for Public Policy in the Augusta office of



the American Lung Association of the Northeast. "Secondhand smoke does not stay within an apartment. It spreads throughout the entire building and puts all tenants at risk. We commend the Governor and MaineHousing for providing leadership in protecting tenants."

The US Department of Housing and Urban Development has released notices supporting smoke-free policies for Public Housing in 2009 and for subsidized housing in 2010. These notices state the dangers of exposure to secondhand smoke and the proven hazard to physical structures, including fire danger, as reasons HUD strongly encourages the adoption of smoke-free housing policies by public housing, section 8 and tribal housing. "A healthy home is a smoke-free home," said Jon Gant, Director of HUD's Office of Healthy Homes and Lead Hazard Control. "Maine was the first state in which all public housing authorities implemented smoke-free housing policies. HUD is pleased to see them lead the nation once again on this important issue by requiring that all recipients of low income housing tax credits create smoke-free multi-unit housing."

For the full QAP document- <http://www.mainehousing.org/docs/qap/clean-final-low-income-housing-tax-credit-rule.pdf?Status=Master>

The Smoke-Free Housing Coalition of Maine is a non-profit coalition supported by the federal grant from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention that funds the Partnership For A Tobacco-Free Maine, the Maine CDC's tobacco prevention and control program. The coalition is comprised of over 50 public health advocates, tenants, landlords, property managers, legal professionals, environmental health professionals and many others working since 2004 to protect Maine residents in multi-unit housing from involuntary exposure to secondhand smoke. The Coalition provides free technical assistance and tools for adopting, implementing and enforcing smoke-free policies in multi-unit properties throughout Maine. To learn more, please visit us at www.smokefreeforme.org or contact the Smoke-Free Housing Coalition at (207)874-8774 or info@smokefreeforme.org.