

Green Retrofit Initiative

Spotlight on Smoke-Free Housing



Beacon Communities

Smoke-Free Housing

- Prohibits smoking in common areas, residential units, and on nearby grounds
- Is legal & nondiscriminatory

The Benefits

- Saves \$1,200 to \$2,600 in unit turnover costs.¹
- Reduces cigarette fire risk, the leading cause of residential fires.²
- Promotes wellness by reducing asthma and allergy risks.³

COST OF REHABILITATING A RESIDENTIAL UNIT

- Nonsmoking
- Light Smoking
- Heavy Smoking

| | | | |
|------------------|-------|---------|---------|
| General Cleaning | \$240 | \$500 | \$720 |
| Paint | \$170 | \$225 | \$480 |
| Flooring | \$50 | \$950 | \$1,425 |
| Appliances | \$60 | \$75 | \$490 |
| Bathroom | \$40 | \$60 | \$400 |
| TOTAL | \$560 | \$1,810 | \$3,515 |

Data reflect surveys from housing authorities and subsidized housing facilities in New England. Collected and reported by Smoke-Free Housing New England, 2009.

Our Story

In 2013, [Beacon Communities](#) embraced the challenge to transition its predominately affordable housing portfolio of 12,000 apartments across the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic to smoke-free. An initial task force of resident services managers, maintenance supervisors, and on-site property managers concluded that they did not know enough to provide a clear recommendation. In response, Beacon spent the next year learning about smoke-free policies, strategies to transition properties and support residents, and practical implementation issues before adopting a May 2014 policy to transition the portfolio to smoke-free over the next 12 months.

During the rollout, Beacon engaged residents and staff to ensure they were comfortable with the approach. Resident surveys were conducted at all properties to better understand resident needs around smoking cessation and services. Results were shared in resident meetings at each community. A video and monthly newsletter articles helped to explain the policy, identify support services, provide tips, and emphasize that “it’s about the smoke, not the smoker”. Beacon embraced the program with its “Proud to be Smoke Free” tag line, providing tote bags to residents at key events and unit lease-up. Resident service coordinators received training to provide smoking cessation coaching from the American Lung Association. Lease addendums and an enforcement policy were created in the spring of 2015.

Building Bridges with Residents

Initially some residents and maintenance staff were wary of the change. Maintenance staff, who typically live in the community, expressed concern about reporting smoking violations of their neighbors. As the discussions continued, these fears diminished. At one meeting, a longtime smoker offered her support to other residents, “I used to smoke 2-3 packs a day. One

“Our internal learning process was a critical step in the transition to smoke-free.”

Mary Cortbell, Senior VP Asset Management, Beacon Communities





“At first, the smoke-free policy was difficult for some residents. Today residents no longer question the policy and we are all on the same page.”

Gil Rivera, Maintenance Superintendent, Beacon Communities



Beacon's Proud to be Smoke Free tote bags helped spread the word!



day I looked and saw myself in the mirror and said, how could this possibly be me? Let me help you. Call me when you want to smoke.” Mary Corthell, Beacon’s Senior VP of Asset Management, sees this as a powerful example of the program building bridges among residents. Beacon is partnering with the Harvard School of Public Health to evaluate the impacts of enhanced resident engagement through social media and behavioral nudges. The study will track smoking behaviors, interest in smoking cessation, and air quality.

Program implementation has gone smoothly to the surprise of some senior managers. **Beacon has not experienced a drop in demand for apartments or any increased losses due to vacancy. Residents have generally embraced the new policy with many taking advantage of the smoking cessation support.** One unexpected consequence at some properties has been increased litter from cigarette butts from those smoking outside. A senior housing community creatively addressed this issue by partnering with students at Virginia Commonwealth University, which has a campus across the street, to collect cigarette butts outside both buildings. Butts are sent to a company that reuses the material to make furniture; Beacon plans to buy a bench made from its recycled litter. “What was a potential source of abutter concerns, created an opportunity for a new cross-generational partnership that aligns with our environmental and health goals,” explained Corthell.

Boston Partners

[Local Initiatives Support Corporation \(LISC\) Boston](#), the [Boston Public Health Commission](#), and the [Massachusetts Department of Public Health](#) provide resources to assist affordable housing owners in adopting green and healthy property management practices that reduce operating expenses and create healthier and more comfortable living environments for residents and staff.

Massachusetts Green Retrofit Initiative

The [Massachusetts Green Retrofit Initiative](#) is a program designed to help affordable housing owners navigate our state’s utility and clean energy programs. In partnership with building science expert [New Ecology, Inc.](#) and [Tohn Environmental Strategies](#), LISC Boston has worked with 50 owners statewide to implement energy efficiency, renewable technologies, water conservation, smoke-free housing, integrated pest management, and green cleaning. For more information, contact Mike Davis at mdavis@lisc.org (617-410-4334) or go to bit.ly/liscgreen.

References

1. Beacon Properties, 2016. Costs vary depending upon tenant smoking habits.
2. NY Office of Fire Prevention and Control, Revised Regulatory Impact Statement, 2003.
3. US Surgeon General, Secondhand Smoke Exposure in the Home, 2006.

Prepared by [Tohn Environmental Strategies, LLC](#)

Local Initiatives Support Corporation, 75 Kneeland St #1102, Boston, MA 02111 | liscboston.org