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Smoke-free housing: a win-win for landlords and tenants

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Multi-unit housing, such as apartments and condominiums, are among the few places where people continue to be involuntarily exposed to secondhand smoke. In response to frequent requests for assistance from tenants, the Multnomah County Health Department Tobacco Prevention Program has partnered with the American Lung Association of Oregon and Clark County Public Health to launch the Portland-Vancouver Metro Area Smokefree Housing Project.

Together with an advisory board representing both landlord and tenant interests, the Smokefree Housing Project announces the availability of two new resources to help landlords and tenants reduce secondhand smoke: a website, www.smokefreeoregon.com/housing and a how-to booklet, "A Landlord's Guide to No-Smoking Policies." The website and how-to booklet offer practical tools, like sample lease language, marketing tips, free signage, enforcement ideas and handouts for tenants. Tenants will find suggestions for talking with their neighbors and landlord about reducing secondhand smoke. The website has a link to smokefree vacancies through www.housingconnections.org.

"Landlords have a lot to gain from no-smoking rules: less painting, less expensive turnovers, reduced fire hazard. Plus, tenants will be healthier because they won't have to breathe secondhand smoke where they live," says Kylie Meiner of Multnomah County Health Department. "There is a strong market demand for smoke-free housing. A survey in 2006 found that 75percent of renters in the Portland-Vancouver metro area would prefer to live in a building with a no-smoking rule. Over a third of multi-unit building residents are regularly exposed to secondhand smoke."

"Property owners and managers should know that they have every right under fair housing laws to restrict smoking in and on their property. Smoking is not a protected class; neither smokers nor the act of smoking is included as a protected class under federal, state, or local Fair Housing laws," states Pegge McGuire, Executive Director of the Fair Housing Council of Oregon.

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