



## SMOKE-FREE LIVING

### Allen County Smoke-Free Housing Project

#### Tips to Writing a Letter to a Landlord, Owner, or Management

A series of written communications are recommended to begin the process of requesting a smoke-free policy. The first letter should have a friendly and helpful tone, followed by your concerns about tobacco smoke drifting into a unit. It may help to include a letter from a doctor, facts about secondhand smoke, why no smoking policies are legal, and other information.

Steps You Should Consider	Examples You May Borrow From (be original and use your own words)
<b>Start on a positive note.</b> Landlords get a lot of different complaints, so start by explaining why you like your unit, the building, and any special services.	Dear _____, The _____ (name) apartment building is located very near my job, is affordable, has lots of storage space, and is well designed. Parking is convenient, the area is quiet, and the clubhouse helps me get some regular exercise. In short, I like living here.
<b>What is the problem?</b> Explain the problem, but do not go into detail yet. If others are affected, be sure to mention that too. Let them know you need their help. Keep the letter as factual as possible and avoid emotional statements.	However, as much as I like this apartment, I and other residents are experiencing serious health problems due to tobacco smoke seeping into our apartments from adjoining apartments. The situation has become intolerable and we need your assistance to resolve this problem.
<b>What's in it for them?</b> The costs of refurbishing a smoking apartment can be a huge incentive for making policy changes. Write about the benefits of a smoke-free policy and reassure them that they will not lose business – one of the reasons landlords permit smoking. You may want to provide a fact sheet or letter indicating that: 1) many residential buildings already have no-smoking policies; 2) it is legal to prohibit smoking in a residential building (ORC 3794); and 3) surveys indicate most residents prefer smoke-free housing.	This building and the health of all its residents could benefit from instituting a no-smoking policy because: <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) A smoke-free building saves money by reducing the costs of cleaning and repairing carpets, fixtures, and window treatments; priming and painting walls; and general maintenance. Lower insurance premiums are a possibility as well. The cost for cleaning a two-bedroom, two-bathroom apartment that has damage caused by smoking can run anywhere from \$4,000 to \$15,000.</li><li>2) You will likely attract and retain residents. In Ohio, nearly 80% of all adults do not smoke and among people 65 and older about 93% are nonsmokers according to the Centers for Disease Control.<sup>8</sup> This means you should be able to attract plenty of nonsmoking renters.</li><li>3) Surveys prove that there is strong support for smoke-free policies. 66.7% of households in Ohio report having smoke-free home rules, according to the Centers for Disease Control.<sup>8</sup></li></ol>



	4) Enforcement generally is not a problem. "Few owners experience backlash from residents after implementing and enforcing a no-smoking policy," according to the National Apartment Association.
<b>Explain your health symptoms.</b> Let the landlord know how secondhand smoke affects you, when you first noticed it, and what your doctor has told you. Attach a letter from your physician.	Personally, the fumes from tobacco smoke give me headaches, causes nausea, and dizziness, aggravate my breathing, and affect my weak heart. I began noticing the fumes shortly after a new resident moved into the unit directly below me in October. My doctor has prescribed some medications to reduce the pain, but has told me to avoid exposure to tobacco smoke because it affects my health. A letter from my doctor is attached.
<b>Are other residents affected?</b> If you have contacted other residents, mention how it affects them. Some may not want their names mentioned, so check with them first.	Other residents are experiencing health problems as well due to tobacco smoke coming into their units. For instance, the resident in unit 12 has chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), asthma, and allergic reactions to tobacco smoke. The resident in unit 33 is nearly blind from macular degeneration – which tobacco smoke irritates severely.
<b>Propose a solution that benefits everyone.</b>	I/We understand your desire to be sensitive to the wishes and concerns of all residents who live here. Therefore, I (and several other residents) ask that you consider conducting a survey to determine resident attitudes toward tobacco smoke exposure, how many people smoke in their units, and the level of support for a smoke-free policy. You might also consider holding a meeting to discuss this issue.
<b>Ask for a response, and offer your assistance.</b>	Please let me know in writing how you plan to address this issue. Let me also know if I can be of any assistance. If you would like to review samples of materials that other housing complexes have used to survey residents and to institute smoke-free policies, I would be happy to provide that. The Allen County Health Department may be able to provide guidance, assistance, and educational materials.
<b>End on a positive note.</b>  * Have others review the letter before you send it.	Working together, we can make this building a better place for us all! I look forward to hearing from you.  Sincerely,
<b>Send copies to your local health department and other health groups.</b> Your letters may be taken more seriously.	At the bottom of the letter, indicate where copies are being sent.  CC: The local health department, Ohio Department of Health, The American Lung Association of Ohio, American Cancer Society of Ohio
<b>Delivering the letter.</b>	To obtain proof that your letter was received, use certified mail with a return receipt through the post office.
<b>Response</b>	If the response is positive, be sure to thank the landlord either by phone or by mail. If there is no response within 30 days or if it is negative, then a second letter may be appropriate.

*This sheet is provided as a public service and is not intended as legal advice.*

*Adapted from GASP of Colorado (Group to Alleviate Smoking Pollution)*



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