



SAN DIEGO
HOUSING
COMMISSION

News Release

June 11, 2013

**Media Contact: Maria Velasquez, Vice President
Community Relations & Communications
619-578-7560 mariav@sdhc.org**

SAN DIEGO HOUSING COMMISSION GETS APPROVAL TO ADOPT A SMOKE-FREE POLICY FOR ITS RESIDENTIAL PROPERTIES FROM THE SAN DIEGO CITY COUNCIL

SDHC's decision follows actions by state and federal governments; majority of SDHC residents support eliminating smoking in their apartment buildings

SAN DIEGO, CA—Following a 2012 California law that authorized landlords to prohibit smoking at their rental properties, the San Diego Housing Commission (SDHC) has adopted a smoke-free policy for all SDHC-owned apartment buildings, with the unanimous approval today from the San Diego City Council, sitting as the Housing Authority of the City of San Diego.

SDHC-owned apartments provide affordable homes for low-income San Diegans. SDHC's smoke-free policy will take effect on February 1, 2014, providing tenants with ample notice.

"I want to commend the San Diego Housing Commission for its leadership on this smoke-free policy," Councilmember Marti Emerald said. "These people are the least able to pick and choose where to live. I find it highly ethical to offer them a healthy place to live."

Before moving forward with the policy, SDHC surveyed tenants, and a majority who responded to the survey said they prefer a smoke-free living environment.

The new smoke-free policy prohibits smoking anywhere at SDHC-owned residential properties, which include more than 2,000 affordable housing units. Smoking is not allowed in individual apartments or within 25 feet of the buildings. The policy applies to residents, their guests, and SDHC employees or contractors working on-site.

"Smokers can still live in SDHC-owned apartments, but they cannot smoke on the premises," said SDHC President & CEO Richard C. Gentry. "The new policy seeks to protect the health of our tenants and will also reduce maintenance costs by preventing smoke damage to rental units."

SDHC's new policy also achieves an objective of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

HUD issued a notice on July 17, 2009, that strongly encouraged public housing authorities in the United States to implement nonsmoking policies at some or all of their properties. HUD reissued the notice on May 29, 2012.

HUD made its recommendation because "environmental tobacco smoke can migrate between units in multifamily housing, causing respiratory illness, heart disease, cancer, and other adverse health effects for those living in neighboring residences."

In addition, California lawmakers enacted legislation, Senate Bill 332, to allow landlords to take action such as SDHC's smoke-free policy. This state law took effect on January 1, 2012.

SDHC distributed surveys to 2,186 tenants living in SDHC-owned housing units beginning in 2012. SDHC received 764 completed surveys. Of those who responded, 65 percent said they prefer a smoke-free building. SDHC also held a tenant forum on April 4, 2013, at the SDHC Achievement Academy, and a majority of the speakers supported the smoke-free policy.

If residents want help to quit smoking, SDHC will connect tenants to the local American Lung Association, which provides information about how and where to get help.

In addition to protecting tenants' health, the smoke-free policy is also expected to reduce maintenance costs for SDHC.

A 2009 study based on surveys of housing authorities and subsidized housing facilities in New England determined the average cost of rehabilitating a nonsmoking residential unit was \$560. But the cost of rehabilitating a unit where light smoking occurred was \$1,810. The rehabilitation cost for a unit with heavy smoking was \$3,515. The data were collected and reported by Smoke-Free Housing New England.

On February 1, 2013, SDHC began using a lease addendum to prepare tenants for the potential implementation of the smoke-free policy. The addendum notified new tenants and residents who were renewing their leases that SDHC may be implementing a smoke-free policy in the future.

The SDHC Board of Commissioners approved the adoption of a smoke-free policy on May 10, 2013, which also required today's action by the Housing Authority of the City of San Diego.

For more information about SDHC, visit www.sdhc.org.

###