



(Don't) smoke 'em if you got 'em

Guardian Management antismoking czar helped establish company's strict no-smoking policy

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BY TYLER GRAF

It's been nearly a year since Guardian Management, among the city's largest property management companies, instituted its no-smoking policy at all 12,000 of its rental units throughout the West Coast, and the policy has cleared the air, according to the company.

Guardian's antismoking czar, Jim Wiard, is also the vice president of property management for the company. He helped spearhead the policy, and said similar policies are becoming the industry standard.

The company's no-smoking policy, established in January, prohibits smoking inside apartments and common areas, such as entryways and parking garages. Patios and balconies are also off limits. If smoking outside, people must stay at least 25 feet from buildings.

"We just wanted to eliminate the threat of secondhand smoke," Wiard said. "It could easily drift from one residence to another."

It's a strict policy, but one that property managers and residents are beginning to embrace. According to the Smoke-Free Environments Law Project, an organization that advocates for smoke-free apartments, almost 100 housing authorities around the nation have now adopted smoke-free policies at some or all of their apartment buildings.

And maintaining a smoke-free apartment has gained traction, due in part to the natural progression of smoking bans. Figures from various studies indicate that smokers are becoming accustomed to smoking outside and would not question nonsmoking policies in apartments.

In the next progressive step, starting in January, Oregon bar goers desiring a nicotine fix will be relegated to the outdoors.

But Wiard said smokers are becoming more amenable than ever to nonsmoking environs. In fact, Guardian Management surveyed residents at 17 of its properties and discovered that smokers and nonsmokers alike were satisfied with the policy.

The company also found that among smokers, 43 percent reported smoking less since the policy was implemented and nearly half of all smokers reported making an attempt to quit in the past year.

Nationally, the trend holds: A smaller percentage of households are now classified as smoking, according to a 2007 Morbidity & Mortality Weekly Report. In 2003, data showed that 73 percent of American households were nonsmoking, versus only 43 percent in 1993.

And although there may be economic benefits to a complex-wide smoking ban, a property management company's insurance rates are not affected by going the non-smoking route. So that incentive doesn't exist, according to Ron Fredrickson, the consumer advocacy expert at the Oregon Department of Insurance.

"It's an interesting idea, though," Fredrickson said. "Some company could come up with that policy, but so far anyway we haven't seen it."

Wiard said property managers have moved toward nonsmoking apartments because that's the natural trajectory of the industry, so the shift toward nonsmoking units has been organic and gradual.

"What we found was a sensitivity to the policy," Wiard said. "Smokers have been generally receptive to it."