

Exposed to Secondhand Smoke in your Multi-Unit Home?

7 Things You Can Do

The most frequent question that we get at ANR Foundation is from people who are being exposed to their neighbor's secondhand smoke, in their apartment, condominium, or other type of multi-unit building. We know how frustrating and harmful this is, and we're sorry that you're facing this difficult situation. We strongly believe that everyone deserves to live in a safe, healthy, smokefree environment. This is an issue that can require both patience and persistence.

Here are some suggestions to help you think about your options and how to take action:

1. If you feel safe doing so, **have you spoken with your neighbor** to let them know that their smoke is coming into your space? It sounds simple, but sometimes people don't even realize how much their smoke drifts and bothers people. By letting them know that it's creating a problem for you, they might be willing to change where they smoke. That may not always be the case, but it can be a useful first step.
2. Be sure to **document when and where the smoke is coming into your unit**, or patio, or where you're experiencing it. Putting it in writing can demonstrate patterns and you're documenting evidence of what is happening. This can be as simple as keeping a running list for a few weeks, on a notepad or your computer, where you might write: "Thursday, February 13, 8-10pm, smoke on the patio again," or "7am smelling smoke in the bathroom."
 - a. **Pro Tip:** You can also jot down any physical symptoms you may be experiencing. You can also share this information with your doctor and ask them for a letter to document the physical effects of this exposure on your health, and that you should not be exposed to any secondhand smoke.
3. **Do you know if your building has a policy** about where people can and cannot smoke? Look at your lease, HOA rules, or ask your management about whether there is a smokefree policy for your building, and if so, what restrictions are in place. It's helpful to know where you're starting from. Your building may need to adopt a policy, or, if there's already a policy that some residents are not following, then it's time for management to take better steps to enforce the existing policy. We have [tips available on our website for landlords](#) and managers about how to communicate with residents to more effectively enforce a smokefree policy.
4. **It's important for you to share your story and ask for what you need.** It's okay to speak up about wanting to breathe air in your home that's free from toxic secondhand smoke. You can ask your landlord, property manager, HOA or other entity that's in charge of making rules for your building, if they have a process in place for dealing with complaints about secondhand smoke. You can also ask them if they'd be interested in learning about why and how they can adopt a smokefree policy for your building—which is perfectly legal for them to do. They might be interested in learning that a smokefree building has lots of business benefits: including saving them money and time in maintenance costs, and it can help them attract and retain residents. The best way to communicate with your landlord is in writing, so sending them an email or letter is your best bet.
5. **If you live in California**, there are now more than 100 cities and counties that have adopted local laws that regulate smoking in multi-unit housing, laws that go beyond regulating smoking in common areas and also require people not to smoke in their units. Some of those laws are very

strong and prohibit smoking inside all buildings, including in everyone's units, while other laws have gaps or partial coverage. You can look at [ANRF's list of smokefree multi-unit housing laws](#) to see if there's already a law in your community and what it covers—or whether your community still needs to take action to expand smokefree protections to include all multi-unit housing.

6. If you live in a city that **does NOT have a smokefree law** for multi-unit housing—whether you're in California or any other state—this is a good opportunity to contact your local tobacco prevention program to let them know you're exposed to secondhand smoke at home, and to ask them if there resources to support you and your landlord in going smokefree. You can also ask if there's a local coalition that you can join—because there's strength in numbers. Sharing your story with local tobacco prevention partners gives them information that can help support the development of a local law in the future.
 - a. **How to find your local tobacco prevention program:** depending on where you live, there are often tobacco control and prevention programs as part of local, county, or state health departments. For example, if you live in Oklahoma, there's a state department of health which you can contact; search online or go to your public library for assistance.
7. We also encourage you to **contact your local city council member** or other local elected leaders, to share your story. Letting your community partners and your local policymakers know that secondhand smoke exposure is a real problem for you—and letting them know that you support adopting a local law to protect your ability to live in a safer, healthier, smokefree environment—are useful ways to demonstrate that you need and want change.

Remember, sharing your story and asking for what you need is very powerful, and these are key parts of improving this challenging situation of being exposed to secondhand smoke at home. One person can make a difference!

Sometimes you may need to enlist the help of an attorney in certain situations. Note that we don't have referrals for legal assistance and our opinions are not legal advice, but a guideline to advocate for yourself.

You've got this!

More reading and resources:

- [The Smoker Next Door](#)
- [Frequently Asked Questions from Housing Providers about Smokefree Buildings](#)
- [Model Smokefree Lease Addendum](#)
- [Tips for Housing Providers: Talking with Residents about Your Building's Smokefree Policy](#)
- [Enforcement Tips for Building Managers and Maintenance](#)
- [U.S. Laws for 100% Smokefree Multi-Unit Housing \(List\)](#)
- [Secondhand Smoke in Housing Infographic](#)
- [Resources on the dangers of secondhand smoke](#)
- [Resources for Homes](#)
- [Success Story for HOA / Condo](#)
- [Stories from residents](#)

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For more information visit our Smokefree Housing page: no-smoke.org/at-risk-places/homes/

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