

RESEARCH BRIEF

DECEMBER 2021

**PREVALENCE OF SMOKE-FREE
HOUSING POLICIES IN THE
MINNEAPOLIS HOUSING CHOICE
VOUCHER PROGRAM**



BACKGROUND

According to the United States Surgeon General, there is no risk-free level of exposure to secondhand smoke.¹ In multi-unit housing, such as apartment buildings, secondhand smoke drifts, exposing residents, guests, and staff to harmful toxic chemicals. This exposure can cause a range of illnesses from headaches and asthma attacks to stroke and cancer.

Live Smoke Free (LSF), a program of the Association for Nonsmokers - Minnesota, and the Minneapolis Health Department (MHD) are working in partnership to increase the availability of smoke-free housing in the City of Minneapolis. A 2016 survey of Minneapolis property owners showed that 45% of buildings with subsidized units had a smoke-free policy, compared to 71% of market-rate buildings.² This disparity perpetuates health inequities for low-income residents who have disproportionately high exposure to secondhand smoke and less access to smoke-free housing options.

In 2018, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Smoke-Free Public Housing Rule took effect, requiring all public housing across the country to implement smoke-free policies. This rule built momentum for other types of smoke-free affordable housing.

To better understand low-income residents' access to smoke-free housing options in Minneapolis, LSF and MHD partnered with the Minneapolis Public Housing Authority (MPHA) to survey owners of rental properties whose rents are subsidized by Housing Choice Vouchers (HCVs).

What is the Housing Choice Voucher Program?

In the United States, Section 8 of the Housing Act of 1937 provides government subsidies for low-income housing. There are two types of Section 8 subsidies:

- **Project based:** the subsidy is given to private owners who then offer lower rents
- **Housing Choice Voucher:** the subsidy is given to renters as a voucher that can be used to pay rent to private owners

In Minneapolis, the MPHA administers the program to property owners/managers.



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OBJECTIVES

- To understand the prevalence of smoke-free policies at Minneapolis rental properties where residents use HCVs
- To understand barriers to adopting a smoke-free policy for property owners participating in the HCV program
- To understand property owner support for citywide smoke-free housing initiatives
- To offer technical assistance to interested property owners

METHODOLOGY

The survey was collaboratively developed by LSF, MHD, and MPHA. It included questions about the quantity of units/properties owned and the existence of smoke-free policies at those properties. Additional questions about property owner support for citywide smoke-free housing initiatives were modeled on assessments completed in neighboring Twin Cities metro communities.

The survey was conducted online using SurveyMonkey. MPHA promoted the survey via email to a list of 1,126 Minneapolis property owners in the HCV program once on August 16, 2021 and again on August 24, 2021. Property owners had two weeks to complete the survey.

Incentives were offered to respondents in the form of a raffle to win one of twelve \$25 Target gift cards.

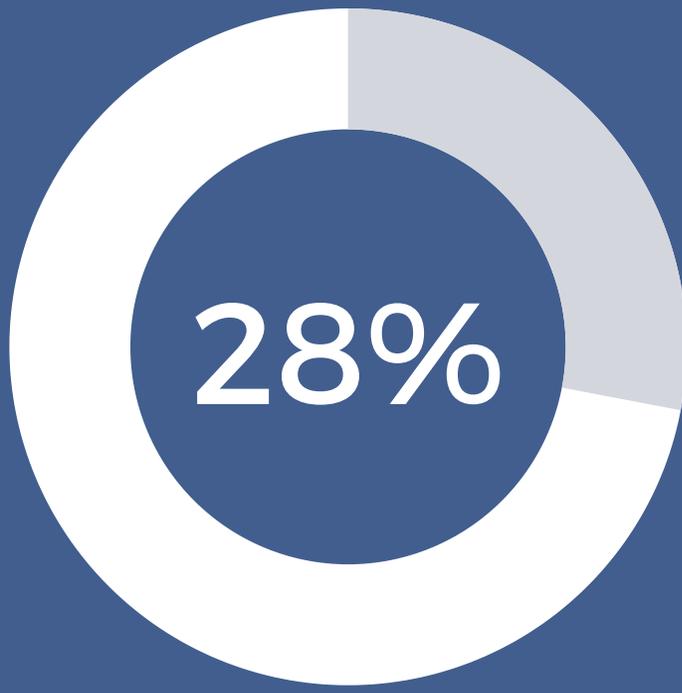


Figure 1

PREVALENCE OF SMOKE-FREE POLICIES

Respondents reported that 28% of the HCV properties represented in the survey do not have smoke-free protections.

RESULTS

The survey was sent to 1,126 Minneapolis property owners/managers in the HCV program. There were 112 respondents and the response rate was 10%.

The respondents represented 474 properties and 28% of those were identified as single-family homes. The rest (72%) were identified as multi-unit housing.

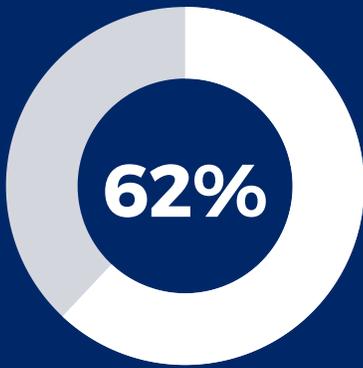
Respondents were asked to select a range of total units that they own/manage. Most respondents (74%) said they managed 1-12 total HCV units. Ten percent (10%) of respondents said they managed 101 units or more and the rest fell in between.

PREVALENCE & CHARACTERISTICS OF SMOKE-FREE POLICIES

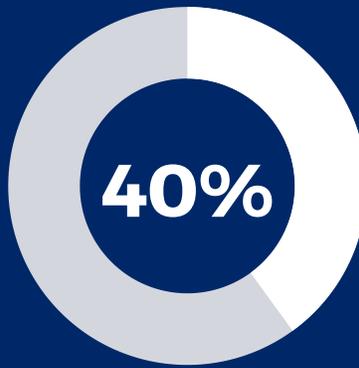
Eighteen percent (18%) of respondents indicated that none of their HCV properties currently have a smoke-free policy. These respondents own/manage 28% of the total properties represented in the survey. Thus, more than one-quarter of the 474 HCV properties represented in this survey do not offer any type of smoke-free protections for their residents. (*Figure 1*).

According to respondents with smoke-free policies, the majority cover 100% of indoor areas as well as prohibit vape/e-cigarette use. A minority (40%) prohibit smoking in outdoor areas. None include exemptions for residents who smoke (*Figure 2*).

FIGURE 2: CHARACTERISTICS OF SMOKE-FREE POLICIES



of the properties with smoke-free policies also prohibit **vape/e-cigarette** use



of the properties with smoke-free policies prohibit smoking in some or all **outdoor areas** of the property (in addition to the interior areas)



of the properties with smoke-free policies included **exemptions** for residents who smoke

REASONS GIVEN FOR NOT ADOPTING A SMOKE-FREE POLICY

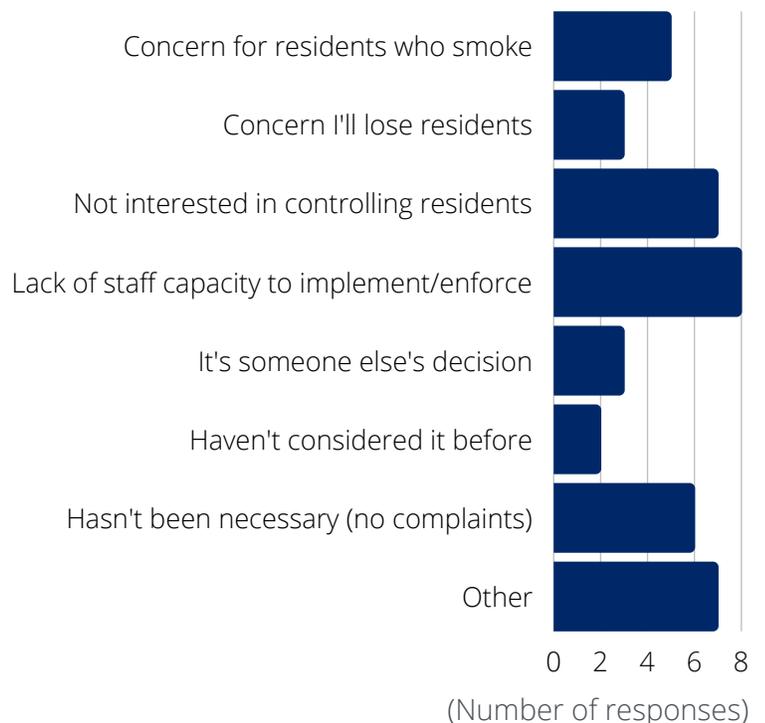
Respondents who did not have a smoke-free policy at any of their HCV properties cited reasons like concern for smokers and lack of staff capacity (Figure 3). Several respondents commented that although they do not currently have a policy, they will likely adopt one in the future.

"I am strongly considering adopting a smoke-free policy."

In addition to the options provided, respondents wrote in additional reasons including concerns about enforcement, fairness, and control of residents.

Free technical assistance is available from LSF and MHD to address these concerns.

FIGURE 3: REASONS GIVEN FOR NOT ADOPTING A SMOKE-FREE POLICY



SUPPORT FOR CITYWIDE SMOKE-FREE HOUSING POLICIES OR INCENTIVES

Note: As of July 1, 2021, 65 municipalities in California have enacted a law that prohibits smoking in rental multi-unit housing properties. Many other communities in the U.S. are considering doing the same.³ To gauge interest and support for citywide smoke-free housing initiatives in Minneapolis, respondents were asked their opinion about disclosure policies, ordinances, and incentives.

SMOKE-FREE DISCLOSURE POLICY

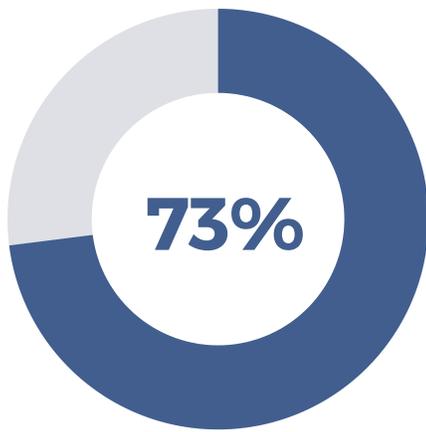


Figure 4

of respondents would **support** a citywide policy requiring property owners/managers to **disclose** the property's smoking policy to potential residents before lease signing.

SUPPORT RATIONALE (COMMON THEMES)

- Promotes resident awareness so that they can make informed decisions about their health
- Provides upfront communication about policy that benefits compliance and owners

OPPOSITION RATIONALE (COMMON THEMES)

- Is unnecessary, and/or creates an administrative burden
- Perceived enforcement concerns

SMOKE-FREE HOUSING ORDINANCE

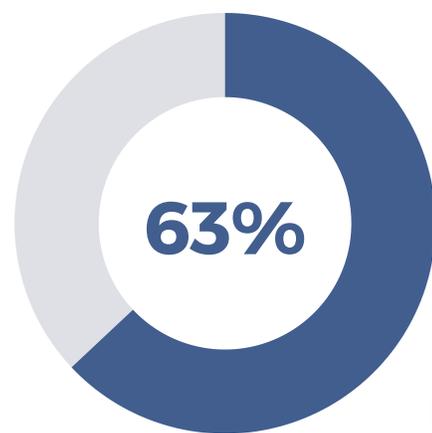


Figure 5

of respondents would **support** a citywide **policy** requiring apartment buildings to have a smoke-free (no-smoking) policy that covers all indoor areas.

SUPPORT RATIONALE (COMMON THEMES)

- Protects resident health and safety
- Reduces property damage, maintenance, and cleaning costs

OPPOSITION RATIONALE (COMMON THEMES)

- Is unnecessary and/or creates an administrative burden
- Perceived enforcement concerns
- Should be property owner's decision

INCENTIVES TO ADOPT A SMOKE-FREE POLICY

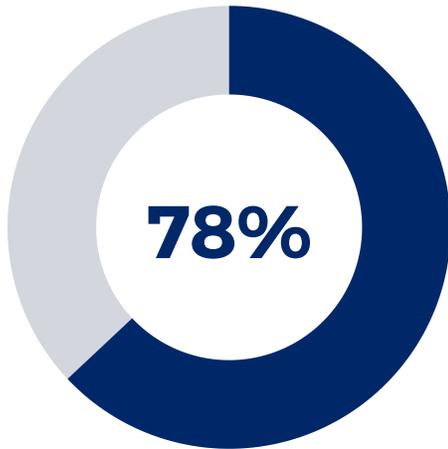
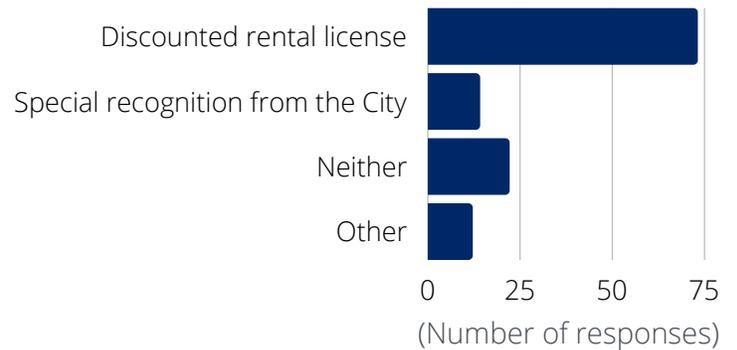


Figure 6

of respondents would support some type of incentive to adopt a smoke-free policy. The majority (71%) of respondents would support a discounted rental licensing fee as an incentive for adopting a smoke-free policy. Fourteen percent (14%) of respondents would support an incentive in the form of special recognition from the city. Respondents wrote in other incentives they would support including:

- Free, high-quality signage⁴
- Lower taxes
- Friendlier relations between City and landlords



SUPPORT RATIONALE (COMMON THEMES)

- Financial incentives help owners save money and keep rent down
- Promotes policy adoption which reduces costs and protects resident health and safety
- General support for incentives as opposed to regulations

OPPOSITION RATIONALE (COMMON THEMES)

- An Incentive is unnecessary
- Perceived enforcement concerns

"It would be great to have a lesser fee for promoting "no smoking" but it would be a good policy regardless."

NEED FOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

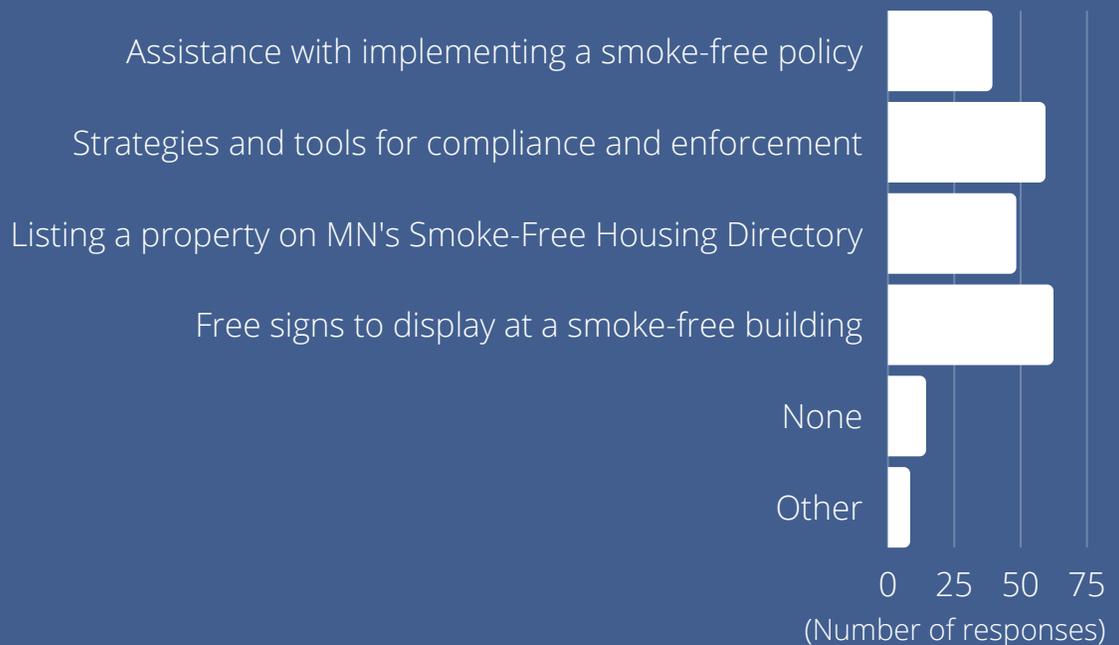
Nearly one third of respondents expressed an interest in technical assistance to go smoke free at their properties. LSF and MHD provide free technical assistance to help property owners and managers adopt and implement smoke-free policies. After a policy is implemented, LSF and MHD continue to provide compliance and enforcement support. Twenty-nine percent (29%) of respondents indicated interest in technical assistance with things like policy adoption/implementation guidance, signage, and compliance/enforcement tools (*Figure 7*).

29%

of respondents expressed interest in technical assistance from Live Smoke Free.

Figure 7

Respondents identified which resources would be most helpful.



DISCUSSION

LIMITATIONS

This survey was conducted with a limited number and amount of incentives which likely negatively impacted the final sample size and response rate. It is possible that greater incentives would have produced a better response rate.

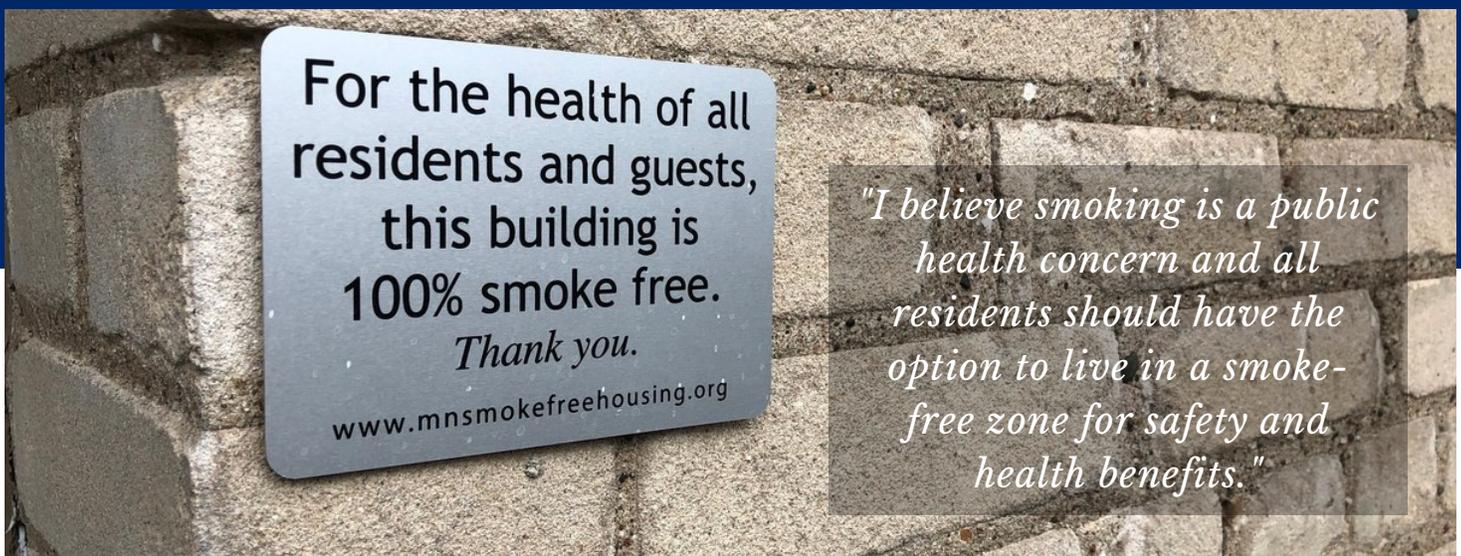
The survey was limited in scope to properties where HCV subsidies are in use. Additional funding would allow for more comprehensive research of smoke-free housing perceptions in other types of affordable housing.

CURRENT SMOKE-FREE HOUSING PROTECTION IN HCV PROPERTIES

Researchers have documented disparities in American's exposure

to secondhand smoke. Notably, Americans who live below the poverty line and Americans who rent their homes experience exposure at higher rates than those living above the poverty line and those who own their homes.⁵

This survey's finding that 72% of properties that receive HCVs currently have smoke-free policies in place is a sign of progress. Unfortunately, nearly a third of respondents still do not offer their HCV residents any smoke-free protections where they spend the majority of their time, at home. More progress is needed to ensure that all Minneapolis residents have equal access to a smoke-free home.





COMPREHENSIVENESS OF CURRENT SMOKE-FREE POLICIES

Fortunately, all properties that currently have a smoke-free policy report that 100% of indoor areas are covered with no exemptions. This is a positive finding as it is the only way to effectively protect residents from secondhand smoke exposure.⁶

Unfortunately, respondents indicated that not all of their smoke-free policies protect residents from secondhand vape/e-cigarette aerosol or from outdoor exposure to secondhand smoke. This suggests that education and technical assistance are needed to update and strengthen existing smoke-free policies.

REASONS GIVEN FOR NOT ADOPTING A SMOKE-FREE POLICY

Respondents reported the top three reasons they have not adopted a smoke-free policy are 1) lack of staff capacity to implement and enforce a policy, 2) not interested in

controlling what residents do in their homes, and 3) lack of complaints about smoking (hasn't been necessary). These responses indicate that there is a continued need for smoke-free housing education and technical assistance for property owners, managers, and renters.

SUPPORT FOR CITYWIDE SMOKE-FREE HOUSING INITIATIVES

Respondents showed strong support for citywide smoke-free housing initiatives. Support was strongest for financial incentives for smoke-free policies (i.e. discounted rental license fees), followed by disclosure policies, and ordinances.

The most common reasons given for supporting citywide smoke-free housing initiatives included protecting resident health and reducing costs related to maintenance and cleaning.

"This is a health issue, and should be a required disclosure just like lead paint is."

"Smoking in a unit causes damages. Landlords are faced dealing with burnt marks on carpets, flooring, counter tops and also having to apply more coats of paint due to smoking."

Those not in favor of citywide policies voiced concerns about perceived enforcement challenges, regulatory overreach, and administrative burden. It is important to note, this survey was conducted in August 2021, not long after the Minneapolis City Council passed a renter protection ordinance and was considering rent control. Ordinances that protect renter wellbeing are a powerful public health strategy however, negative property owner perceptions of these city priorities may have influenced responses in this survey.

"I support incentives, just cool it with the prohibitions."

Another common concern was perceived difficulty of enforcing a smoke-free policy. After many months of pandemic eviction moratoria, many owners feel as though they have no mechanism to enforce their own leases generally, and thus some questioned how a smoke-free housing ordinance could be enforced.

"That kind of policy would be healthier, but how would you enforce this policy?"

Note: LSF offers many free resources to educate and assist property owners and managers with smoke-free compliance and enforcement.⁷

Respondents also voiced concerns that a citywide smoke-free housing ordinance would contribute to housing instability for underserved communities. Some thought that such ordinances could create barriers to housing for people who smoke and contribute to evictions and homelessness.

Public health best practice strongly emphasizes a multi-step equitable implementation and enforcement strategy with eviction only as a last possible resort. This approach maximizes the overall health outcomes of smoke-free housing policies.

NEED FOR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

Smoke-free housing education and technical assistance is available to managers in the HCV program. LSF can provide policy adoption, implementation, compliance, and equitable enforcement support at no cost to the property.



KEY TAKEAWAYS, ACKNOWLEDGMENTS, & NOTES

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The majority of respondents indicated that their HCV properties are covered by some type of smoke-free protections
- Nearly a third of HCV properties represented by this survey have no smoke-free protections at home
- Overall, owners and managers in the HCV program strongly support smoke-free housing protections and citywide initiatives to promote smoke-free housing
- Continued outreach and technical assistance to Minneapolis affordable housing property managers is still wanted and needed
- More research is needed to understand the prevalence and perceptions of smoke-free housing outside of the HCV program

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This project was a collaboration between Live Smoke Free, a program of the Association for Nonsmokers-Minnesota, Minneapolis Health Department, and Minneapolis Public Housing Authority. It was funded by Minneapolis Health Department and the Statewide Health Improvement Partnership of the Minnesota Department of Health.

NOTES

1. Office on Smoking and Health (US). The Health Consequences of Involuntary Exposure to Tobacco Smoke: A Report of the Surgeon General. Atlanta (GA): Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (US); 2006. 1, Introduction, Summary, and Conclusions. Available from: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/books/NBK44328/>
2. Minneapolis Health Department Smoke-Free Rental Housing Survey Research Brief, November 2016
3. American Nonsmokers' Rights Foundation, U.S. Laws for 100% Smokefree Multi-Unit Housing, <https://no-smoke.org/wp-content/uploads/pdf/smokefreemuh.pdf>
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