

SMOKE FREE MULTI-UNIT HOUSING NORTH-CAROLINA

Ginkgo Residential

In 2007, Teresa Sandman, Director of Property Management for Ginkgo Residential, was worried about the risk of fire at her properties. She worried about tenants losing possessions, about losing entire buildings, but mostly about her tenants' safety. "I've never lost a human life and I was very concerned that might happen," Teresa said. A smoke-free policy was a great way to reduce the risk of fire. Ginkgo Residential now has nearly 40 smoke-free properties in Virginia, North Carolina and South Carolina.



Bridges at Wind River, Raleigh, NC.
Photo provided by Ginkgo Residential.

Preparing for a Change

Teresa took a small group of property managers to lunch and asked them to be test sites for the new smoke-free policy. They all agreed to work with her. Together, they surveyed the residents and found that many people favored smoke-free living. With widespread support from the residents, the company began to prepare for the policy change. Each property installed well-marked smoking stations, with sturdy disposal urns, away from the buildings. They created no smoking signs, maps to smoking areas, and educational materials for residents.

How It Works

Under the new policy, residents are allowed to smoke only in designated outdoor areas. As current residents renewed their leases, they signed a non-smoking addendum. According to Teresa, people haven't moved out because of the policy. Now that the policy is in effect, employees discuss the policy with potential residents before they sign a lease. When enforcement is necessary, property managers give tenants a series of warnings, followed by a series of escalating fines. Eviction has never been necessary.

Smart Tips

Ginkgo has smoking areas that are convenient, well-lit, and ADA-compliant to protect residents' safety.

Many Ginkgo residents have pets, so the company distributed educational materials that explained the impacts of secondhand smoke on animal health.

Ginkgo Residential wanted residents to know that they didn't implement the policy to profit from the fines, so when residents are fined for violating the policy, they send their check to the American Lung Association, not to the management company.

Parting Words

There may be some people who are resistant to policy changes, says Teresa, so she is careful about how she frames the issue. She doesn't see the policy as an attack on smokers. It's a policy to protect the safety of all residents. With that approach, she was able to sell smoke-free policies to skeptical audiences, including her property managers, many of whom were smokers themselves.



Teresa Sandman of Ginkgo Residential. Photo provided by Teresa Sandman.

To hear other property owners' and managers' stories:

Visit the NC Division of Public Health's Smoke-Free Housing Website:

<http://www.smokefreehousingnc.com>



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