

# NEWS RELEASE

## Panhandle

Public Health District

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For immediate release.

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### ***Smoke-free housing is key to protect renters from second-hand smoke exposures and fire hazards***

As temperatures start to dip for the holiday season, there is an increase in instances of smokers moving indoors to avoid the cold but with that comes risks to increased fire hazards along with many in multi-unit housing residences experiencing exposure to secondhand smoke.

There is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke. Secondhand smoke contains more than 7,000 chemicals and can cause numerous health problems, especially in infants and children. In addition to secondhand smoke, smoking indoors can also lead to increased risk of fires. From 2012-2016, smoking was the leading cause of home fire deaths with an average of 18,100 reported home structure fires started by smoking materials. Between 2016-2018, there was a total loss of property from smoking-related fires that cost \$4.8 million in damages in the state of Nebraska.

While smoking in one's home wouldn't typically affect a neighbor that is not the case in multi-unit housing. In 2016, the U.S Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) finalized a rule that requires all public housing agency homes to implement a smoke-free policy which would help reduce risk of fire as well as risks of secondhand smoke exposure.

According to the 2021 Nebraska Multi-Unit Housing Smoke-Free Policy Survey, only 68% of multi-housing properties had a comprehensive smoke-free policy. While this has increased by 22% since 2011, there are still a significant number of renters who might be subjected to secondhand smoke in a housing unit that does not employ a comprehensive plan. Among those without a smoke-free policy, 78% in Section 8 housing stated that enforcement of policies was difficult. According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), about 20% of adults in multi-unit housing use combustible tobacco products which is a source of secondhand smoke exposure. About 34% of people in multi-unit housing report that secondhand smoke involuntarily enters their home from somewhere else in the building.

PPHD can offer help for implementing smoke-free policies and helping to enhance policies already in place to ensure they are successful to keep all who occupy homes safe from the dangers of tobacco products. For more information, contact Melissa Haas, Environmental Health Coordinator at 308-487-3600 Ext. 108

Panhandle Public Health District is working together to improve the health, safety, and quality of life for all who live, learn, work, and play in the Panhandle. Our vision is that we are a healthier and safer Panhandle community.