

# Voluntary Smoking Policies Survey In Central Vancouver Multi-Family Property

Research and Summary Report Analysis conducted for:

## Clark County Public Health



**Public Health**  
Prevent. Promote. Protect.

September 2012







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## Summary Report

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The following summary report describes the core findings from research data collected for Clark County Public Health during the summer of 2012. The report is divided into the following sections:

Methods .....	1
Overall, 180 properties are included in the combined phone survey/mail-out sample, representing a total of 4,848 units.....	1
Summary of Findings .....	3
Half of all rental properties in Central Vancouver are covered by no-in-unit smoking policies. ....	3
Properties with fewer units are more likely to have rules that forbid in-unit smoking. ....	4
One third of all <i>units</i> in the target area are covered by a no-in-unit smoking rule set by the landlord. ....	5
The 36% of units that are now covered by no-indoor-smoking rules represents a substantial increase over the percentage recorded in 2006 in a county-wide survey. ....	6
The trend toward non-smoking units continues to grow. ....	7
Landlords predict the trend to increasing numbers of non-smoking units will continue. ....	8
The concept of “indoor” smoker vs. simply “smoker” remains important to communicate. ....	9
The sharp difference in perception between those who forbid smoking and those who allow it can be seen in a question on the effect of advertising smoke-free units. ....	10
Appendix .....	11
Verbatim Comments	
Survey mailing pieces, including questionnaire	



## Methods

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**Overall, 180 properties are included in the combined phone survey/mail-out sample, representing a total of 4,848 units.**

The survey was designed to sample information on voluntary smoking policy practices at multi-family rental property in the Central Vancouver area (see target area map). A mixed methodology was used in which owners of properties with fewer than 20 units were sent a hardcopy of the survey by mail with a self-addressed, stamped return envelope<sup>1</sup> while those whose properties have 20 units or more were located by phone and asked the same set of questions. Data were then entered, processed, and analyzed into this brief, summary report. Because the response rates for the different data collection methodologies varied, data printouts show the larger unit property responses separate from the small unit properties to allow for verification of the degree to which the two subsamples that make up the whole may differ.



- ▶ **Sample for larger properties (primarily by phone):** Any owner of a property listed as having 20 or more units was identified for participation in the phone survey process, which involved Internet searches and telephone “chaining” to identify the appropriate property representative to participate in the survey by phone. Some of those owners also owned properties with fewer units and, when feasible, the data for those smaller properties was taken over the phone at the same time the information on the larger property was collected. As a result, in the original database, 84 out of 104 phone-survey eligible properties in the target area responded for an 81% response rate overall from the phone surveys. This resulted in 64 properties that were self-identified as having 20 or more units (which, together, represent 4,044 total units).
- ▶ **Sample for smaller properties (primarily by mail-out survey):** Among the under-20-unit properties 96 out of 208 properties responded for a 46% response rate overall from the mail surveys. Combining these with the additional 20 properties in the phone survey that self-identified as having fewer than 20 units, the total sample size for the smaller properties is 116 properties representing 804 units.

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<sup>1</sup> In total, three mailings were actually sent out — a card announcing the survey, the survey itself about a week later, and the survey sent a second time to those who had not responded approximately two weeks after the original survey mailing.

- ▶ **Reliability:** Overall, 180 properties are included in the sample, representing 4,848 units. Statistical reliability for a sample “n” of 180 from a population “N” of 312 is  $\pm 4.6\%$  using industry-standard assumptions applied to a small population universe.<sup>1</sup>
- ▶ **Database availability:** The data from which the following analysis has been derived have also been entered into a database, sortable by specific property address, for the benefit of future follow-up by Clark County Public Health. It is important to keep in mind that self-administered surveys do not result in perfect data — while the great majority of the data collected is aligned with the information already in the assessor’s database, some is not. As a result, there are a few cases where the self-reported number of units is quite different (up or down) compared with the information provided by the assessor’s office. Note also that the database includes a few more respondents than are analyzed in this report (2 more at the time of report publication) simply because some additional surveys came in well after the analysis had begun — a common occurrence with mail-out surveys.
- ▶ **Exclusion of certain known smoke-free properties from the survey.** Finally, it should be noted that, if anything, the incidence of smoke-free housing in the target area is actually higher than is reported in this analysis. Specifically, 13 properties owned by the Vancouver Housing Authority and one owned by Columbia Non-Profit Housing were excluded from the survey simply because Clark County Public Health already had sufficient information on the smoke-free housing policies already in place at those locations.

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<sup>1</sup> E.g., assuming a dichotomous variable distributed 50/50 (in this case in the specified small universe) at the 95% confidence level.

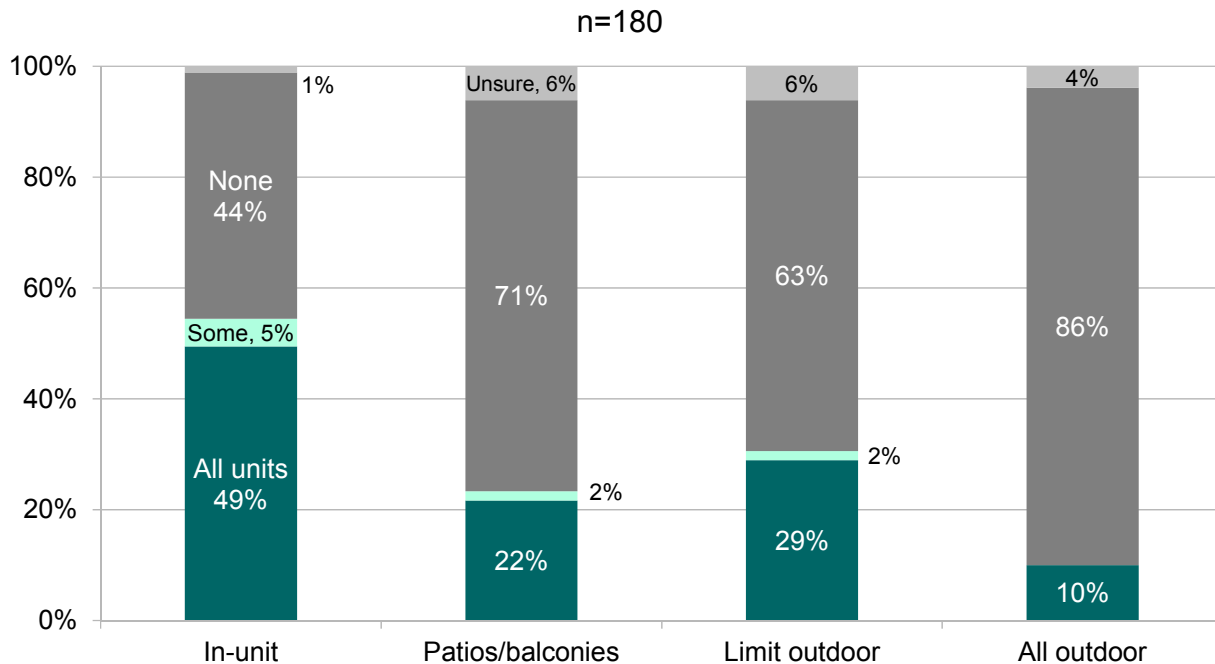
## Summary of Findings

### Half of all rental properties in Central Vancouver are covered by no-in-unit smoking policies.

Out of the 180 properties 49% have rules that forbid in-unit smoking in all units, with another 5% forbidding smoking in some units. Only 10% of properties in Central Vancouver currently have a complete, property-wide outdoor smoking ban.

#### Properties with No-Smoking Rules in Central Vancouver Area

Q: For how many rental units, if any, is there a management policy (whether in the lease, rental agreement, or other rules) that... a) Forbids smoking anywhere inside the dwelling unit; b) Forbids smoking on patios or balconies; c) Limits outdoor smoking to a specified place or distance from the living structure to keep it away from doors or windows; d) Forbids all outdoor smoking on the property.

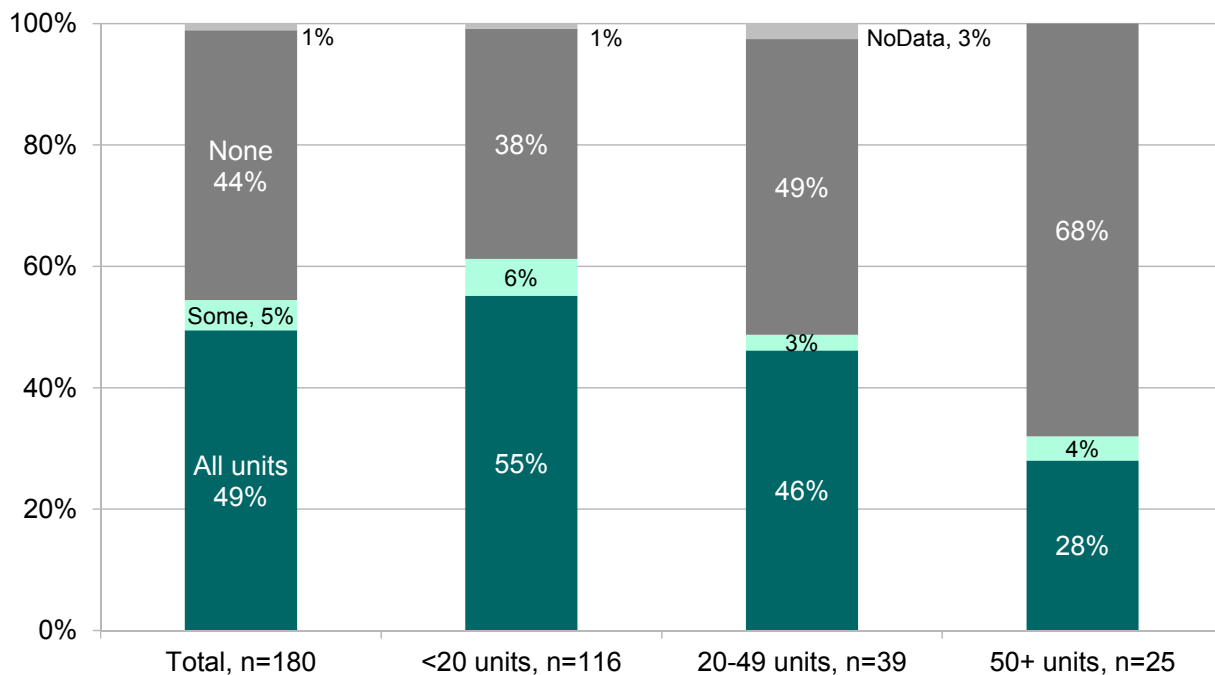


## Properties with fewer units are more likely to have rules that forbid in-unit smoking.

The chart below shows answers to the same in-unit rules question displayed on the previous page, in this case divided by the size of the property. Owners of smaller properties — those with fewer than 20 units — are the more likely to have rules that forbid indoor smoking. Owner/managers of the largest properties (50 or more units at one property) are least likely. Keep in mind, however, the difference between *properties* and *units*: As is reported later in this analysis, because many more units can be found in the two larger property categories that is where the majority of smoke-free units in the target area can be found.

### Property Size Analysis: In Unit Smoking Rules

Q: For how many rental units, if any, is there a management policy (whether in the lease, rental agreement, or other rules) that forbids smoking anywhere inside the dwelling unit?





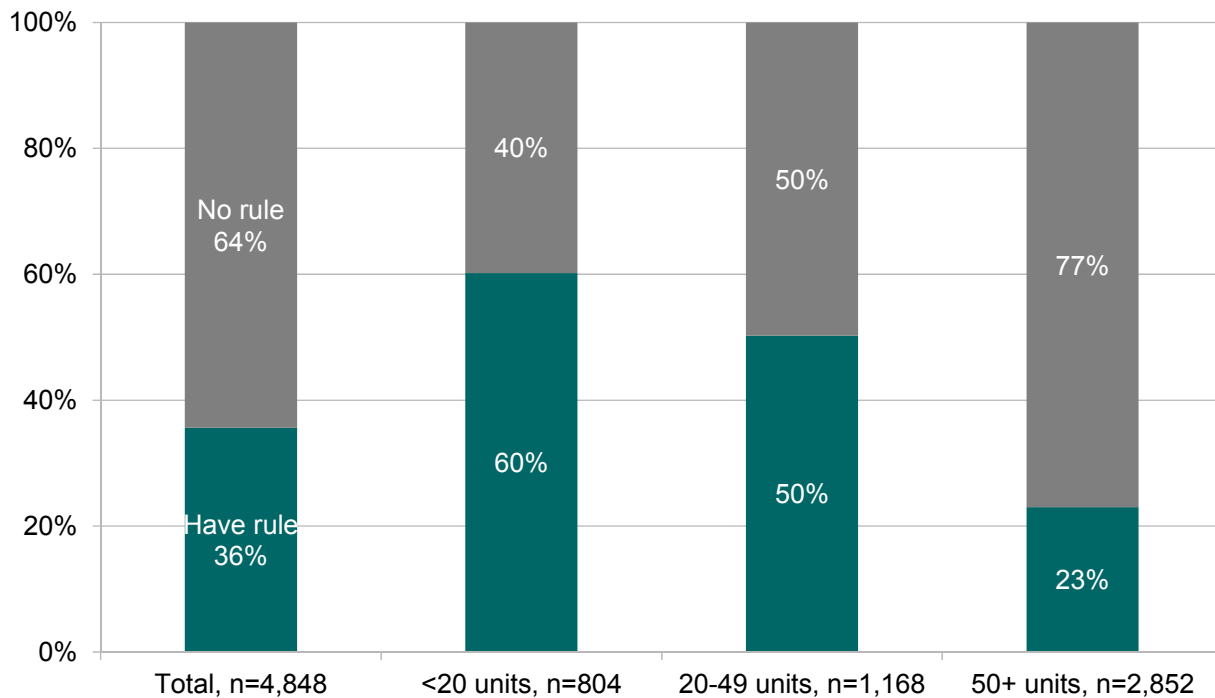
## One third of all units in the target area are covered by a no-in-unit smoking rule set by the landlord.

The following graphic shows the same data on in-unit smoking rules, but displayed on a per *unit* basis, rather than a per *property* basis. The database of responding property managers and owners represent a total of 4,848 units, 1,727 of which are covered by no in-unit smoking rules. Of the no-smoking units, 484 are in properties with fewer than 20 units, 587 are in properties with 20-49 units, and 656 are in properties with 50 or more units. Again, because the larger properties have many more units than the smaller properties, even though their proportional number of units covered by no-smoking rules is smaller, the total number of units covered by such rules is higher.

Keep in mind also that this chart indicates only the number of units in which the owner of the property has set a rule. As our previous research with Clark County Public Health and others agencies indicates, a very large majority of all rental units are covered by no-indoor smoking rules that have been set by the occupants themselves.

### Per-Unit Analysis: In-Unit Smoking Rules

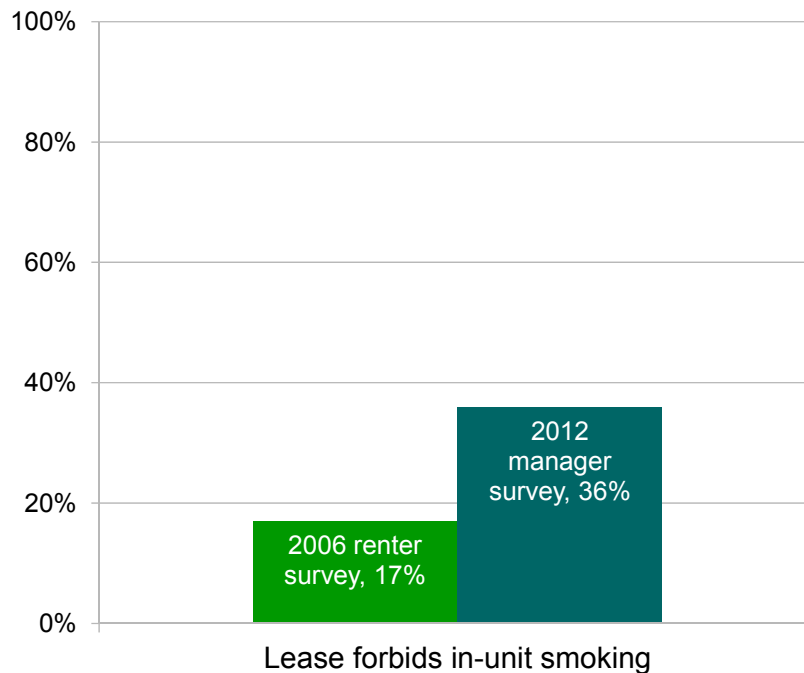
Q: For how many rental units, if any, is there a management policy (whether in the lease, rental agreement, or other rules) that forbids smoking anywhere inside the dwelling unit?



**The 36% of units that are now covered by no-indoor-smoking rules represents a substantial increase over the percentage recorded in 2006 in a county-wide survey.**

In 2006, Campbell DeLong Resources, Inc. conducted a county-wide survey for Clark County Health that surveyed tenants of rental property throughout the county. One of the questions asked had to do with whether or not the tenant’s landlord had set a rule that forbids in-unit smoking. When the survey was taken in 2006, just 17% of rental units in the county were covered by a no in-unit smoking rule set by the landlord. The current survey indicates that, in the Central Vancouver target area, that figure is now 36%. While the data are not directly comparable (primarily because they don’t cover the same geographic areas), the difference is still substantial and, along with other indicators of change on this issue discussed later in this analysis, supports a conclusion that an increasing percentage of units are covered by no-smoking rules in Clark County.<sup>1</sup>

**Comparisons to 2006: Units with rules set by the landlord**



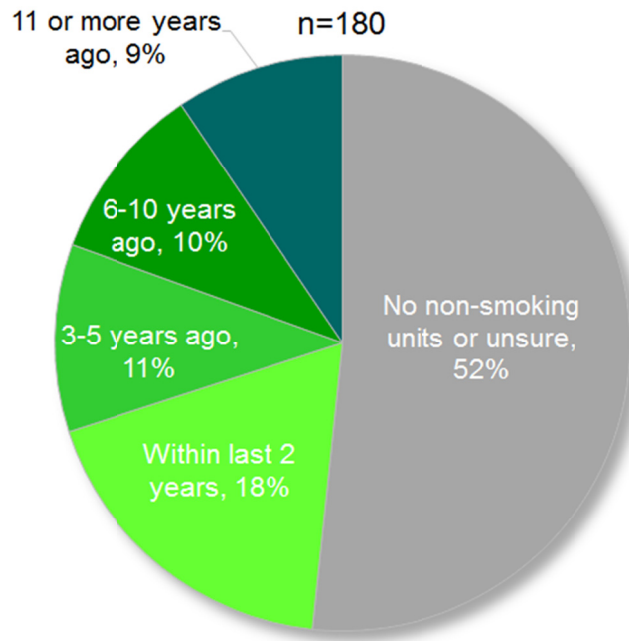
<sup>1</sup> While, primarily because of the differences in geographic area, the comparison is not one-to-one, two other factors would argue that the change suggested by the graphic above is very real: 1) Multi-family property in Clark County that is *not* in the survey target area is thought to skew toward the more expensive end of the market where no-smoking rules are generally more common, not less. This would suggest that including the rest of the multi-family property in the county would not pull the results downward; and 2) As discussed in the Methods section, 14 multi-family properties in the target area that were already known to have transitioned to smoke-free policies were not included in the database for the 2012 survey. If they had been included, the percentage recorded in 2012 would necessarily be higher. In other words, it would seem safe to conclude that a substantial change on this issue has occurred in Central Vancouver in the past six years.

## The trend toward non-smoking units continues to grow.

As the pie chart below indicates, the trend toward implementing no-smoking rules remained strong over the last two years. In other words, the trend is not a passing fad, but a practice that appears to be continuing to grow — findings that are consistent with previous research projections as well.

### Recent Timeline for Transitioning Units to No-Smoking

*Q: If you have any non-smoking units: Think about the most recent unit transitioned to a no-smoking policy. Was that done...*



## Landlords predict the trend to increasing numbers of non-smoking units will continue.

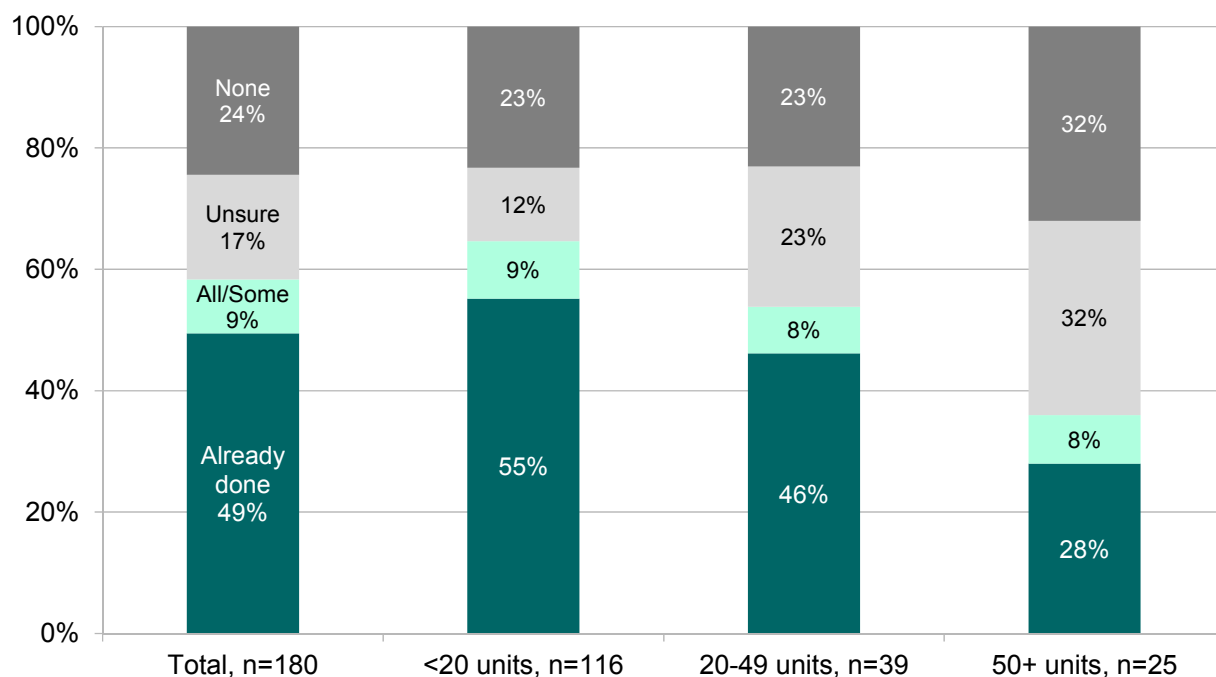
Property owners and managers were also asked to estimate whether they expect to transition smoking-permitted units to non-smoking units sometime in the next five years. Overall, another 9% expect to transition at least some units, if not all, in their properties in the next five years. (Note also that this question produces a larger number of “unsure” responses than other questions, indicating that opinions remain in flux on this issue.)

Regarding the willingness of Central Vancouver area landlords to accept contact from their local health department about the issue, the data indicate that some are willing to accept help (with those who were interviewed by phone being more willing to say “yes” to the question). Overall, 41 properties (23%) are owned or managed by individuals who checked the box indicating a desire for contact from their local health department.

We caution against reading too much into the data shown below — predictions of future behavior are not as reliable as statements of past practices. Overall, we conclude that the transition to no-smoking is continuing and expect the percentage of units covered by no-smoking rules to continue to grow for some years to come.

### Expected Likelihood to Transition More Units to Non-Smoking

Q: If you have units where in-unit smoking is allowed: How many, if any, of the units where smoking is currently permitted do you expect to transition to a no-indoor-smoking rule in the next five years?



## **The concept of “indoor” smoker vs. simply “smoker” remains important to communicate.**

Past research conducted for Clark County Public Health and other tobacco prevention agencies by Campbell DeLong Resources, Inc. has underscored the importance of drawing the distinction in communications to landlords between people who smoke and people who smoke indoors — because it is only the latter group who are actually inconvenienced by a no-in-unit smoking rule.

This matters because one reason landlords who still permit smoking are reluctant to change is a belief that the rule would turn away anyone who smokes — that is somewhere between 20% and a third of the market depending on the tenant population in question. Past research has shown this is not the case — specifically that the majority of people who smoke already have lifestyles that would not have to change to comply with a no-in-unit smoking rule because they already don't smoke inside their homes.

In the current survey, respondents were asked the following question: *“Regardless of any smoking policies, what percent of your adult residents do you estimate... a) are smokers (that is at least monthly) and b) smoke inside the unit at least monthly?”* Previous research has shown that, when landlords' responses are aggregated on a question like this, they are relatively consistent with the self-reporting of tenants as well. In this survey, the responses are in the same range as we have seen in the past — the average estimate for percentage of tenants who smoke is 28% with an average indoor smoker estimate of 13.5%.

## The sharp difference in perception between those who forbid smoking and those who allow it can be seen in a question on the effect of advertising smoke-free units.

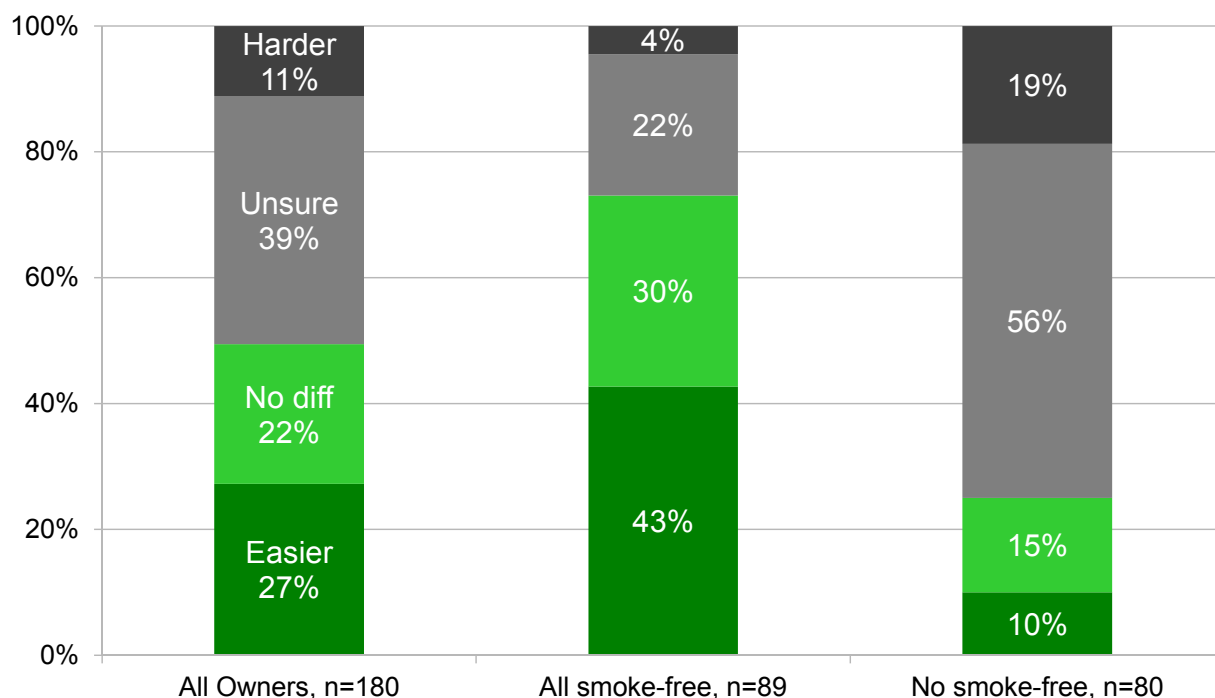
In the research we originally conducted for Clark County Public Health and other tobacco prevention partners we noted a very stark difference in the opinion of landlords who no longer permitted smoking and those who do permit it. In focus groups separated into those who forbid smoking and those who allow it, it seemed at times as if we were speaking with people from completely different worlds. Those who forbid smoking spoke of the ease of keeping their units occupied, the relative simplicity of cleaning a unit where people have not been smoking, and various other benefits. Those who continued to allow smoking were much more likely to complain of having empty units, believe (inaccurately) that low-income tenants have a much higher need to smoke indoors than other tenants, and insist that setting a no-smoking rule would make it harder, not easier, to attract tenants to the property — essentially the exact opposite of what the landlords who had implemented no-smoking policies had experienced. This divide in opinion persists in the marketplace today, and it is important to remember when speaking with individuals who have not yet transitioned a unit to no-smoking.

For a more qualitative understanding of the divide, a review of the verbatim comments offered by participants, listed in the Appendix of this report, illustrates the point as well.

The chart below shows the overall response to the question asked and then compares the answers on the question as given by respondents with all smoke-free units and respondents with no smoke-free units.

### Opinion of Value of Advertising “Non-Smoking” Rental Units

*Q: In your opinion, does advertising an available rental as “non-smoking”... Make it harder to find good tenants; Make it easier to find good tenants; or Make no difference at all?*



## **Appendix**

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## Verbatim comments

The following are the verbatim responses to the final question on the survey which allowed respondents to provide Clark County with any additional comments, suggestions, or concerns on the subject. Note, some comments have been edited by CDRI for clarity.

*Q: If you have other comments, suggestions or concerns you would like to tell Clark County about the subject of this survey, please include them below:*

- ▶ *If we changed our smoking policy that would make it difficult to rent due to this area being a big crime, low-income area. Also, it's difficult to enforce a non-smoking policy.*
- ▶ *Answer to the question on advertising depends on the demographics of possible tenants.*
- ▶ *No matter how you advertise and put a non-smoking clause in the rental agreement, a certain amount of people will always be smokers.*
- ▶ *At the last property I managed, it had a non-smoking policy and that made it easier to get good tenants. As the property manager, I have no say policy at current property.*
- ▶ *We charge for a unit if we detect smoking (such as smell, walls) in the units. We encourage smoking outside only to avoid a charge for damage to unit due to smoking. At this time (as far as we know) all tenants smoke outside.*
- ▶ *I think non-smoking units are more common than smoking units (as far as it not being allowed). My policy also states "no smoking near open doors and windows."*
- ▶ *For the past 15 years it has been a no-smoking property. Previously, we spent too much money when tenants moved out to cover damage from smoking — smell, rugs, painting, cleaning cabinets. We got tired of it so started using a no-smoking policy and wow! Money comes in along with tenants who are looking for non-smoking units. Started the policy and watch how health improves. Tenants who smoke have money for cigarettes but not for food, rent, medical, etc.!*
- ▶ *This is not the government's business. It is a legal substance, a protected class. It is a business decision. I am concerned that the legislature will get involved and it will become a protected class, similar to medical marijuana. Nonsense. I have done previous surveys on this topic for Clark County.*
- ▶ *See attached letter. How do you get a no-smoking policy enforced? (Respondent sent letter with mailed survey; CDRI forwarded letter to Clark County Public Health.)*
- ▶ *I feel this topic is none of the county's concern nor within your jurisdiction and not good use of taxpayer money.*
- ▶ *I have one duplex that has smokers in each unit. My tenants are long-term so I don't advertise.*
- ▶ *I have 31 rental units; 16 are smoke-free inside and outside. You picked 11 of the 15 where smoking is allowed.*



- ▶ *I appreciate your interest on non-smoking — you need to do the same for cleaning the properties, especially the ones south of my property. They are commercial restaurants and there is garbage in the yard — you must inspect.*
- ▶ *We bought this apartment complex. Fifty percent have lived here for 7-10 years. Hard to change in this situation.*
- ▶ *Stay out of other people's business!*
- ▶ *I am a non-smoker. I would like to know if having a no-smoking policy makes it harder to rent units, i.e., increases the vacancy rate. I would prefer all of the units to be non-smoking.*
- ▶ *Craigslist does not allow me to advertise my building as non-smoking even though it's not a protected class. I let people know when I call them.*
- ▶ *This subject rarely comes up these days.*
- ▶ *I don't specifically advertise as having non-smoking units, I just tell them to smoke 20 feet from the building and mostly they comply. I will advertise non-smoking and see what happens. Without exception all of my horrible deadbeat, destroying tenants have been smokers. I have had good tenants that were smokers, but I have not had a bad tenant that didn't also smoke. If I never rented to smokers it would have saved me a lot of money & grief.*
- ▶ *No contact (from Clark County). We have noise issues, maybe two units with smoke damage that we have dealt with.*
- ▶ *Personally we do not smoke. Never have except for childhood adventures. Our apartments are old but we keep them attractive. Our tenants are mostly "working people." Younger tenants usually do not smoke. One man moved here because he had to move from his last apartment as they went to "non-smoking" policy. He was/is very sick but still smokes.*
- ▶ *Policies are typically done by the management company and we have not discussed smoking policies.*
- ▶ *I work for [name of company] and we are a property management company. One hundred percent of our rental units are non-smoking. This has been a positive move for us as there are now more non-smokers and less damage to the homes.*
- ▶ *I ask that people do not smoke in the building.*
- ▶ *I only want contact from Clark County for non-smoking signage to post at my property if they have plaques or signs.*
- ▶ *I am already in contact with Clark County Public Health.*
- ▶ *My rental contract is month to month. If any person is found smoking, their lease is terminated. Thank you.*
- ▶ *Our apartments rent at about \$625 per month. In this price range many tenants smoke. At higher rent levels a no-smoking policy would make sense.*
- ▶ *I think this is an ill-conceived idea. Not sure why the County is doing this. Nothing they can do anyway!*
- ▶ *I appreciate all efforts in support of non-smoking in common areas, areas that are shared.*
- ▶ *Higher-end properties attract healthier tenants. Can't see changing policies at this property due to location that's not higher-end area.*

- ▶ *I have been a landlord off and on since 1984. Except for smokers who came with the building when I bought it, I've never allowed smoking. Keep pushing this non-smoking agenda. It's beneficial for society in every possible way.*
- ▶ *Yes, I'd like contact from Clark County with any materials on this subject.*
- ▶ *I have had rentals since 1973; most are low- to moderate-income units. Enforcing no-smoking policy is a "headache" and I am not sure that one could evict based on breaking this type of policy.*
- ▶ *I would think that advertising a rental as "non-smoking" could be considered discriminatory. Also, it would be impossible to monitor this. I hate smoking but don't know how to get around it. The obvious issues are smoke damage and risk of fire.*
- ▶ *Tenants say they don't smoke, but it's hard to control.*
- ▶ *Few of my renters are smokers, about 20%. All can smoke outside the unit.*

## **Survey mailing pieces**


Dear Clark County property owner,

Clark County Public Health is conducting a survey on property management practices regarding tobacco smoking in and around multi-unit housing located in the Central Vancouver area. In about a week, you will receive a short survey with questions about voluntary smoking policies or practices at your multi-unit residential housing in Clark County.

All participants who return completed surveys will be entered into a drawing to win one of four \$100 gift cards as our way of saying thanks for participating.

When you receive the survey, please take the time to fill it out and return it. The survey will take only a few minutes to complete. Your participation is important in helping Clark County Public Health understand how to work with rental housing providers to support clean air efforts for Clark County residents.

Thank you very much!



Alan Melnick, MD, MPH  
Health Officer

Next steps:

- ▶ Look for your one-page survey in about a week.
- ▶ Fill out one survey for each property indicated on the survey form(s).
- ▶ If you would like an e-mail providing a link to survey results when the analysis is complete, provide your e-mail address on the survey form.
- ▶ Send the survey back using the prepaid postage return envelope.
- ▶ If you have questions call Theresa Cross at Clark County Public Health (360-397-8000 ext. 7378) or Alicia Cash at Campbell DeLong Resources, Inc. (503-221-2005 ext. 203), the independent research firm we have hired to administer and analyze the survey.

Trim line



RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

Address Label



Dear Clark County Rental Property Owner,

Clark County Public Health is conducting a survey on property management practices in the Central Vancouver area regarding tobacco smoking in and around multi-unit housing. Included in this mailing is a short survey with questions about voluntary smoking policies or practices at your multi-unit rental housing in Clark County. We have provided one survey for each property that County property records show you own in the Central Vancouver area.

Please take the time to fill out your survey(s) and return it. The survey will take only a few minutes to complete. We would like to have the survey filled out by a person who is knowledgeable of the management policies and practices at the rental property identified on the survey. When the survey has been completed, place it in the return envelope provided and then in the mail. Postage has already been paid.

*All participants who return completed surveys will be entered into a drawing for a chance to win one of four \$100 gift cards we will give away when the survey is complete, as our way of saying thanks for participating.*

In 2011 Clark County Public Health analyzed data throughout the county related to County public health goals. The assessment looked at both health issues and the readiness of neighborhoods, schools and other organizations to partner with Public Health efforts to improve the health of residents. All of the data and many conversations with community leaders led us to selecting the Central Vancouver area to focus available program resources. Part of our effort includes evaluating smoking policies and practices in multi-unit housing in Central Vancouver because of the relationship of such policies to the availability of clean air for Vancouver residents. We also note that one of the organizations we contacted during this project is the Clark County Rental Association who supports partnerships between Clark County Public Health and landlords in order to promote learning about policies and practices affecting community health.

We know the environment you live in affects your health. Your participation in the survey is a valuable next step in helping Clark County Public Health understand how to work with rental housing providers to support clean air efforts for Clark County residents.

If you have questions about the survey, please contact Theresa Cross at Clark County Public Health (360-397-8000 ext. 7378) or Alicia Cash at Campbell DeLong Resources, Inc. (503-221-2005 ext. 203), the independent research firm we have hired to administer the survey and analyze the survey data.

Thank you for participating! By doing so, you are helping make Clark County a more livable community for all residents.

Sincerely,

John Wiesman, Director  
Clark County Public Health

Alan Melnick, MD, MPH  
Health Officer



Clark County Public Health

VOLUNTARY SMOKING POLICIES SURVEY  
IN CLARK COUNTY RENTAL HOUSING

This survey should be answered regarding the following property which is recorded in the County's public records as: [Property Address] with owner: [Name of owner].

Please have a person familiar with management practices and policies at the property fill in the survey. The information will be used by Clark County Public Health to learn more about current, voluntary smoking practices and policies in rental housing.

1. How many residential rental units are located at this property? (Write "2" for a duplex, "3" for a triplex, and so on) ..... TOTAL UNITS: \_\_\_\_\_

For questions 2 & 3, please circle or write in your answer. If your answer is "some" units, write in a best guess of the specific number. If you Don't Know or the question does Not Apply, circle "DK/NA."

- 2. For how many rental units, if any, is there a management policy (whether in the lease, rental agreement, or other rules) that...
a. Forbids smoking anywhere inside the dwelling unit
b. Forbids smoking on patios or balconies
c. Limits outdoor smoking to a specified place or distance from the living structure to keep it away from doors or windows
d. Forbids all outdoor smoking on the property
3. If you have units where in-unit smoking is allowed: How many, if any, of the units where smoking is currently permitted do you expect to transition to a no-indoor-smoking rule in the next five years?

Please select one answer, or write in your answer, for each of the following questions.

- 4. If you have any non-smoking units: Think about the most recent unit transitioned to a no-smoking policy. Was that done...
5. Regardless of any smoking policies, what percent of your adult residents do you estimate...
6. In your opinion, does advertising an available rental as "non-smoking"...
7. If you would like contact from your local Health Department for assistance in implementing a no-smoking policy, check this box:
8. If you have other comments, suggestions or concerns you would like to tell Clark County about the subject of this survey, please include them below:

Four horizontal lines for providing additional comments or suggestions.

(Optional) Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

Thank you for participating! Please place in postage-paid return envelope and mail.



Dear Clark County Rental Property Owner,

About two weeks ago, you received a questionnaire regarding voluntary policies and practices in Clark County rental property. At the time we mailed this letter we had not yet received your returned survey. If you or someone representing your property has already filled out and returned the questionnaire, we thank you for your participation and ask you to please disregard this reminder.

However, if you have not yet completed the survey, please take the time to do so now. An additional copy of the questionnaire is enclosed for your convenience. Your participation is very important.

If you have any questions about the survey, please contact Theresa Cross at Clark County Public Health (360-397-8000 ext. 7378) or Alicia Cash at Campbell DeLong Resources, Inc. (503-221-2005 ext. 203), the independent research firm we have hired to administer the survey and analyze the survey data.

Thank you for participating! By doing so, you are helping make Clark County a more livable community for all residents.

Sincerely,

Alan Melnick, MD, MPH  
Health Officer