

# Portland Housing Authority

## PRESS RELEASE

Date: November 1, 2010

Subject: Portland Housing Authority Smoke-Free Housing Initiative

At its October 7<sup>th</sup> meeting the Portland Housing Authority (PHA) Board of Commissioners approved a plan to make all its properties smoke-free as of July 1, 2011. The PHA owns and manages almost 1,000 public housing apartments in Portland. It is the largest landlord in the City.

The PHA is one of the last public housing authorities in the state without a comprehensive smoke-free housing policy. There are 24 local housing authorities in Maine.

PHA Executive Director, Mark Adelson, explains, "The Board's support for this initiative is a proactive measure to improve the health of our residents around the problem of second hand smoke. Our residents, particularly those who are senior citizens, have disabilities, as well as the children in our family developments, are impacted the most by this problem. The Board felt strongly that this is an important public health issue that needs to be addressed. Approximately 70 percent of PHA residents and applicants for public housing are non-smokers. Their interests and health deserve this consideration. This does not mean our tenants can't smoke, they just won't be able to smoke inside our buildings."

Furthermore, PHA is looking forward to saving on the cost of repairs and maintenance from the damage caused by secondhand smoke and cigarettes including burned flooring and countertops, and nicotine stained wall surfaces.

Adelson admits this will be a management challenge for PHA. With 574 family apartments and 418 apartments for seniors and persons with disabilities, it will take a lot education, encouragement and oversight for successful implementation of the new policy. "Implementing a smoke-free policy in a large housing authority like PHA will be a challenge, but we know it's worth the effort to protect the health of our tenants and the integrity of our buildings," Adelson comments. PHA has received a lot of help and ideas from other housing authorities in the state and they'll continue to receive assistance from groups like the Smoke-Free Housing Coalition of Maine and the City of Portland's Health & Human Services Department. Smoking cessation programs and services are an important part of the plan and will be provided to residents. It's hoped that some residents will decide to quit as part of this effort.

The PHA has been working on this initiative for several months. Last summer it held a meeting with residents in each of its developments to seek comments on the plan and explain the dangers of second hand smoke. The approval to go smoke free also includes 100 State Street, the 169 unit property for seniors and persons with disabilities, which is owned by the PHA affiliate State Street Housing Preservation Corporation.

It's important to note that the smoke free housing initiative does not impact the 2,000 residents that receive rental subsidies through PHA under the Section 8 Program and live in privately owned properties, unless the landlord has decided to do so. However, PHA encourages private landlords who participate in the program to go smoke free as well.

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