

Benefits of Tobacco-Free Parks & Outdoor Recreation Facilities



Capital District
Tobacco-Free
Communities

- **Tobacco-free parks enhance visitors’ enjoyment of clean air, natural beauty and healthy activities.**
- **Tobacco-free policies protect all park visitors from the harmful effects of exposure to secondhand smoke.** Secondhand smoke is a human carcinogen for which there is no safe level of exposure. Even in outdoor settings, secondhand smoke levels can reach levels as high as those found in indoor facilities where smoking is permitted. Exposure to secondhand smoke is especially harmful to children and adults with asthma or other chronic conditions.
- **Tobacco-free policies reduce cigarette litter.** Discarded cigarette butts pollute the land and water and are highly toxic and dangerous to children, domestic animals, and wildlife. Small children are at risk of swallowing, choking or burning themselves with discarded butts and suffering nicotine poisoning.
- **Tobacco-free policies communicate a positive message to the community that tobacco use is not compatible with an active, healthy lifestyle.**
- **Tobacco-free park policies enjoy overwhelming support of Capital District residents.** The most recent data from Community Surveys conducted by Siena Research Institute in 2013 and 2015 found majority support for tobacco-free recreation areas among Capital District residents: 81% favor smoke-free playgrounds—including 3 out of every 4 current smokers; 76% favor smoke-free municipal pools (2013); 61% favor smoke-free beaches and parks (2015).
- **Policies provide consistency among community athletic facilities and groups.** The majority of community sporting events are held at either municipal or school district athletic facilities, and all school districts prohibit tobacco use on their entire grounds. Also, many community athletic associations have policies but use public recreation facilities and would benefit from a municipal policy.
- **Policies reduce maintenance costs and fire risks.** Cigarette butts are the most littered item in the world and they aren’t biodegradable. Carelessly discarded cigarette butts are a frequent cause of fires, especially during periods of dry weather.
- **Tobacco-free policies help promote the message that tobacco use and sports just don’t mix.** The tobacco-free sports movement is growing among professional athletes and for good reason—tobacco use reduces physical health and athletic performance.

Look who’s tobacco-free in the Capital District!



City of Albany
City of Cohoes
City of Schenectady
City of Troy
City of Watervliet
County of Albany
Town of Bethlehem
Town of Colonie
Town of East Greenbush
Town of Glenville

Town of Guiderland
Town of Niskayuna
Town of Rotterdam
Town of Sand Lake
Village of Altamont
Village of Green Island
Village of Menands
Village of Nassau
Village of Scotia
Village of Voorheesville



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FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

About Tobacco-Free Park Policies in New York



What is current New York State Law on smoking in public parks?

An amendment to the NYS Public Health Law Article 13-E, effective October 10, 2013, prohibits smoking between sunrise and sunset at all playgrounds in New York when one or more children under age 12 are present. The prominent posting of signage is also required by law to inform and encourage compliance by community members.

Are local governments able to enact policies restricting tobacco use?

NY Public Health Law explicitly provides that local communities can “adopt and enforce additional local law[s], ordinances, or regulations [relating to smoking] which comply with at least the minimum applicable standards set forth” by the state law. [N.Y. PUB. HEALTH LAW § 1399-r]

What is the difference between a park policy and an ordinance?

In general, park policies are rules regarding municipality-owned park property established by local park boards and are often approved by local councils or county boards. Generally, those who ignore park policies do not receive a fine, but are asked to refrain from using tobacco or leave the premises. Ordinances are local government enactments that regulate people or property and carry a penalty such as a fine for violations.

Should a policy cover all property or just certain areas?

In New York, both types of policies exist, but the recent trend is toward “all property” policies because they are most effective at reducing exposure to secondhand smoke, easier to understand, and easier to enforce.

How do other New York State communities enforce their policies?

Most communities rely upon voluntary compliance for their policy enforcement and encourage self-enforcement by widely publicizing the policy, and posting prominent signage with positive messaging. Prominent signage empowers all park visitors to provide friendly reminders about the policy to violators. The majority of Capital District communities with policies have utilized free signage available from Capital District Tobacco-Free Communities.

Are existing policies working?

Across the state and in the Capital District, municipalities that have adopted policies report high satisfaction with their policies and positive public response.

What effect do tobacco-free park policies have on youth?

Tobacco-free policies help prevent youth tobacco use by establishing tobacco-free community norms that tobacco use is not compatible with an active, healthy lifestyle.

What other benefits result from tobacco-free policies?

Parks are about enjoying clean air, natural beauty and healthy activities. Protecting park users from the harmful and damaging effects of secondhand smoke can prevent asthma attacks and other respiratory health ailments. Also, cigarette butts are the most littered item in the world and are not biodegradable. Littered cigarette butts are toxic and can harm children, domestic pets and wildlife, if ingested.

Will policies keep some people from using public park and recreation areas?

Actually, not having a policy is more likely to have an effect on overall use. The most recent data from Community Surveys conducted by Siena Research Institute in 2013 and 2015 found majority support for tobacco-free recreation areas among Capital District residents: 81% favor smoke-free playgrounds—including 3 out of every 4 current smokers; 76% favor smoke-free municipal pools (2013); 61% favor smoke-free beaches and parks (2015).

Further, tobacco-free policies do not restrict any person from using parks and recreation areas or attending events there. Rather, they only restrict the use of tobacco while there. Other behaviors (which may be legal in private settings) are already prohibited in such areas, including alcohol use, gambling, and public indecency.

How many municipalities in New York have adopted tobacco-free outdoor area policies?

As of May 2017, more than 500 New York municipalities have adopted tobacco-free outdoor area policies (20 in the Capital District) and the list is growing.