

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 and electronic e-cigarette aerosol emissions.** 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. The aerosol emitted by electronic smoking products frequently contains a variety of human carcinogens such as formaldehyde and benzene, and has been deemed harmful by the U.S. Surgeon General.
- **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 and electronic product use on their entire grounds. Also, many community athletic associations have tobacco-free policies and would benefit from a tobacco-free policy at the public facilities they use.
- **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 impairs 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 Guilderland
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

Capital District
Tobacco-Free Coalition



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

NYS Public Health Law Article 13-E prohibits the use of tobacco products 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. The NYS Legislature recently passed a law which would also prohibit the use of electronic products (currently awaiting the Governor's signature).

Are local governments able to enact additional 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 kinds of local policies are currently in effect in the Capital Region?

Fifteen Capital Region municipalities prohibit tobacco use anywhere within their public parks; five prohibit tobacco use on or near playing fields, pools, and playgrounds. Several municipalities initially prohibited tobacco use in certain areas but expanded their policies to cover the entire park because 100% tobacco-free policies are more effective at preventing secondhand smoke exposure, easier to understand, and easier to enforce.

Why tobacco-free rather than smoke-free?

Municipalities often set out not only to prevent secondhand smoke exposure, but also to protect the natural environment, decrease exposure to toxic tobacco litter, promote a positive health message, and contribute to a tobacco-free community norm. Policies that prohibit all tobacco use, including electronic products, are most effective at achieving these combined goals.

Why include e-cigarettes?

While electronic smoking devices are arguably less dangerous than traditional tobacco products, they are by no means "safe" for either users or those exposed to the secondhand aerosol emissions that they produce. E-cigarette aerosol has been found to contain nicotine, heavy metals and a variety of other chemicals that are known human carcinogens.

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. 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 other benefits result from tobacco-free policies?

Tobacco-free parks first and foremost protect all park users from exposure to the harmful and damaging effects of secondhand smoke and electronic cigarette aerosol emissions, helping to prevent asthma attacks and other respiratory health ailments. Tobacco litter—the most littered item in the world—is not biodegradable and is not only unsightly, but toxic to children, domestic pets and wildlife, if ingested. Tobacco-free policies significantly reduce tobacco litter.

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

Actually, not having a policy is more likely to decrease people's use of these shared public spaces. 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). The community norm for shared public spaces is becoming a tobacco-free norm.

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

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