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Survey of Capital Region Landlords Highlights Emerging Trends in Smoke-free Housing

A majority of property owners have non-smoking policies

Albany, NY – A survey conducted this spring by Siena College Research Institute (SRI), on behalf of the Capital District Tobacco-Free Coalition and the Southern Adirondack Tobacco Free Coalition, reveals that a majority of property owners in six upstate counties have non-smoking policies in their rental housing and are completely satisfied with those policies. SRI invited landlords in the counties of Albany, Rensselaer, Saratoga, Schenectady, Warren and Washington to complete this survey on their tobacco policies and their attitudes towards those policies; the report compiled the response of 421 landlords who manage over 10,000 units of housing in the region.

Across the counties, 54% of property owners have a smoking policy in at least some of their multi-unit rental properties. A majority (53%) of those with a policy have had that policy in place for five or more years, while 17% have had the policy for less than three years. Non-smoking policies vary and can prohibit residents and visitors from carrying lit tobacco in one or all of the following areas: inside all or some rental units, common areas, entrances and grounds.

Tri City Rentals, the largest apartment management company in the Capital Region, made a corporate decision in 2009 to encourage all of their apartment communities to convert at least one of their buildings to a non-smoking policy. So far, 10 Tri City Rentals apartment communities have at least one no-smoking building and The Glen at Sugar Hill, a 60-unit luxury apartment community in Brunswick, opened as 100% smoke-free. Across New York State, property owners of multi-unit housing, ranging from luxury apartments to public housing, historic duplexes to affordable senior apartments have established policies beyond the required Clean Indoor Air Law, to eliminate smoking in all indoor areas and to create tobacco free grounds.

The motivation for adopting these policies was explored in the SRI survey conducted by mail and online between April 20, 2010 and June 28, 2010. Landlords who already had smoke-free policies in place indicated that the following reasons prompted their initial decision to adopt non-smoking rules: reducing fire hazards (91%), reducing clean up and repairs (85%), reducing health risk for residents (73%), reducing complaints from tenants (67%) and reducing insurance rates (44%).

When asked to agree or disagree with a series of statements that probed the impact of their smoking policies, 80 percent agreed that having a non-smoking policy has lessened their maintenance costs. A majority, 61%, indicated that they have received positive feedback from tenants and their guests about their non-smoking policy and 78 percent stated that tenants have not complained about the non-smoking rules.

“I haven’t had one complaint and I haven’t found one instance of smoking in my building since instituting the policy,” said Robert McRae, an Albany landlord, who converted his three-unit row house six years ago. “I can’t think of one disadvantage to my decision to have a smoke-free building.”

The greatest concern expressed by property owners without a smoking policy was dealing with enforcement issues. While 43 percent of owners with a policy agreed that it has been difficult to enforce the non-smoking policy, a notable 97 percent of owners who currently have smoke-free housing policies on their rental property stated that they are satisfied (84% completely) with their decision to implement the policy.

“Landlords sometimes hesitate to go smoke-free because they see the barriers more than the benefits. It’s clear from this survey and from those I’ve worked with that the benefits of cost savings, fire safety and improving tenant health clearly win out,” said Jeanie Orr, Project Coordinator of the Capital District Tobacco-Free Coalition. Both tobacco-free coalitions provide landlords with free technical assistance, including sample leases and tenant surveys, as well as free signage.

The Capital District Tobacco-Free Coalition and the Southern Adirondack Tobacco Free Coalition are grant funded programs from the NYS Bureau of Tobacco Use Prevention and Control. The Capital District Tobacco-Free Coalition is a non-profit partnership of people and organizations from Albany, Rensselaer and Schenectady counties. The Southern Adirondack Tobacco Free Coalition serves Saratoga, Warren and Washington counties. Both coalitions work to decrease the social acceptability of tobacco use, eliminate exposure to secondhand smoke, promote cessation and prevent the initiation of tobacco use among youth and young adults. For more information on the coalitions and their programs, go to www.SmokeFreeCapital.org or www.tobaccofreeadiondacks.org.

Siena College Research Institute was founded in 1980 and conducts regional, statewide and national surveys on business, economic, political, voter, social, academic and historical issues. The results of SRI surveys have been featured in major regional and national newspapers, scholarly journals, books, local and network television and radio. SRI subscribes to the American Association of Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) Code of Professional Ethics and Practices.

Samples of Smoke Free Housing in the Capital Region

Property	Housing Type	County
Annandale Mansion	Historic Renovation	Saratoga County
Brandywine Apartments	Market Rate	Albany
The Conservatory	Luxury	Rensselaer County
Capital Green Apartments	Market Rate	Albany
Excelsior Place	Historic Renovation	Schenectady
The Glen at Sugar Hill	Market Rate	Rensselaer County
Kingsway Community	Senior	Schenectady County
The Landings at Lake George	Senior	Warren County
McGregor Village	Market Rate	Saratoga County
Prestwick Chase	Senior	Saratoga County

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