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## Boston public housing going smoke-free in 2012

By Kay Lazar

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Boston is set to become the first big city in Massachusetts - and the largest in the nation - to ban smoking in public housing, beginning in September 2012.

In the next few weeks, about 25,000 tenants will receive letters announcing that their buildings will be smoke-free and that they will have to agree to the new policy when they sign their annual leases.

The policy is aimed at protecting nonsmokers, especially children, from breathing in secondhand cigarette smoke from neighboring units, which can cause asthma attacks, respiratory infections, lung cancer, and heart disease.

"We feel this is in the best interests of our residents," said the Boston Housing Authority's spokeswoman, Lydia Agro. "When you have buildings with multiple apartments next to each other, there is no way to contain the smoke."

The city also launched a registry yesterday for landlords to list smoke-free units, to make it easier for renters to find them.

Agro said the federal Department of Housing and Urban Development granted its approval in July for the public housing smoking ban.

She said the authority has also been working with the Boston Public Health Commission for the past two years to offer residents smoking cessation programs, in anticipation of the smoking ban.

Agro said a poll the agency conducted last year found a smoking ban would have widespread support among public housing residents with families, the elderly, and the disabled. Of 1,300 people surveyed, roughly 90percent said they favored smoke-free housing, while 10 percent objected, Agro said.

Still, some residents, such as Lilly Berry, have mixed emotions about the plan.

Berry, a 64-year old grandmother who has lived in the West Broadway development in South Boston for decades and now has five grandchildren there, said she believes the authority should provide smoke-free housing complexes, but opposes a systemwide ban.

"Make some smoke-free housing mandatory and let people choose to live there," Berry said. "But I feel that people should have the right to choose - that's the American way."

Berry quit smoking 13 years ago after her father, a longtime smoker, died of lung cancer. Her older brother, also a smoker, died of the disease two years later.

Berry, a former tenant leader who was recently employed by the authority to help other tenants, suffers from a progressive respiratory disease. Other family members living in West Broadway struggle with asthma, she said.

Public health officials say secondhand smoke seeping in from neighboring apartments can exacerbate problems for asthmatics and people with heart disease and other illnesses.

"The science of secondhand smoke is clear that it contains 7,000 chemicals including more than 60 carcinogens," said Danny McGoldrick, vice president for research at the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, a national antismoking group.

"This measure will protect people from secondhand smoke, particularly kids who live in these places, but it will also encourage smokers to try to quit," McGoldrick said.

Nationwide, about 275 public housing authorities - roughly 9 percent - have adopted smoke-free policies for some or all of their properties, said Jim Bergman, director of the Smoke-Free Environments Law Project in Michigan, a

nonprofit that tracks the issue.

Bergman said Boston will be the largest public housing authority in the nation to adopt a systemwide ban.

Beyond public housing, Boston landlords and tenants who want to clear the air in their buildings have a new tool in their arsenal: a smoke-free housing registry unveiled yesterday by Mayor Thomas M. Menino.

The interactive online registry allows landlords to list properties in which smoking is prohibited and gives consumers the ability to search for smoke-free dwellings by neighborhood, number of bedrooms desired, and price range.

Speaking at a Dorchester news conference, Menino encouraged landlords to list their properties, saying it is good business.

"It's one-stop shopping for the landlords," Menino said.

"It's free," he added. "Nobody has to pay a dime to list their properties."

The registry was created by the Boston Public Health Commission, and commission officials said they would help provide technical assistance to landlords who need help changing their properties to smoke-free dwellings.

They said there is a common misconception that landlords are prohibited from banning smoking.

"It can be part of the lease, the same as if you have a no-pets policy," said Margaret Reid, director of the commission's healthy homes division.

Susan Johnson, a vice president of Maloney Properties Inc., a company that manages thousands of apartments in Massachusetts, including many in Boston, said smoke-free buildings are less expensive for landlords because they have fewer fires, which helps lower landlords' insurance claims.

"It costs more to turn over a unit where someone was a smoker because . . . if the odor is really bad, the carpet has to be replaced," Johnson said.

"There is often more damage to the unit because people drop cigarettes and there are burn marks."

Michelle Green, chief operating officer of the Dorchester Bay Economic Development Corporation, said the organization intends to make 300 of its 780 units smoke-free by the end of 2012.

The city's new registry is at [bostonsmokefreehomes.org](http://bostonsmokefreehomes.org).

Kay Lazar can be reached at [klazar@globe.com](mailto:klazar@globe.com). Follow her on Twitter [@GlobeKayLazar](https://twitter.com/GlobeKayLazar).

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