

SMOKE-FREE APARTMENTS GET HEALTHY RESPONSE

By RICHARD LAKE
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A show of hands: Who has ever checked into a nonsmoking motel room only to find that it smells like a wet ash tray?

Wouldn't it stink if the same thing happened when you moved into a new apartment? Sure it would.

You're a nonsmoker. You don't hate smokers, but you don't want their mess invading your life. So what to do when you need a new place to live?

Rent a smoke-free apartment. Lots of them are around.

It's a trend that's taking off nationwide and here in Las Vegas, said Michael Fazio, executive director of the Southern Nevada Multi-Housing Association, an industry group.

It's becoming popular "because of the public outcry for healthier living," he said. "If it's another amenity you can offer to a potential resident, it's something you can add to the bottom line."

This is a voluntary trend, mind you. No government agency is forcing apartment complexes to offer smoke-free rentals. Indeed, no government agency has that power.

"We receive lots of complaints from renters who complain of smoke entering or permeating their apartments," said Maria Azzarelli, tobacco control coordinator with the Southern Nevada Health District.

She said cigarette smoke can get into some apartments that share a building with others, depending on the building's air circulation system. And an apartment where a smoker used to live can be covered in residue; that's called third-hand smoke in the health industry.

Azzarelli said the dangers of second-hand smoke have been clearly demonstrated.

Third-hand smoke? If you can smell it, it's still there.

"Nicotine particles stick to everything," Azzarelli said.

She said such residue can sometimes aggravate problems for infants or people with lung conditions such as asthma.

Which is why Tom McCoy with the American Cancer Society's Nevada chapter likes the trend.

"Whenever we see that somebody voluntarily steps up and does something, we applaud that, because it's a health decision that's in the best interest of Nevadans," McCoy said.

Despite the purported dangers, however, the health district can do nothing about second- or third-hand smoke in a rental apartment. Nevada's Clean Indoor Air Act applies only to businesses such as restaurants and bars, not to private homes.

"We sympathize with them, of course," Azzarelli said.

Which brings us back to private industry.

Fazio said demand is picking up for smoke-free rentals as the public becomes more aware of potential dangers.

Besides that, it often is cheaper to maintain a rental that's never been smoked in. Cleanup after a move out is easier, for one. And renting out the cleaned up place can be easier, because there's no smell lingering.

There are several local complexes that offer smoke-free buildings. One is Cheyenne Villas in North Las Vegas.

Assistant Manager Susie Henderson said they have three smoke-free buildings, totaling 24 apartments out of the 369 in the complex. The complex has some vacancies, but all the smoke-free units are full.

She said the complex uses the smoke-free label in its advertising. It can be a great selling point.

Rose King, 72, lives in a smoke-free unit. She doesn't smoke, but she has relatives who do.

"I don't allow them to smoke in the house," she said.

The Health District, which has worked with the housing association on educating complex owners, has listed on its Web site five local complexes that offer some smoke-free apartments.

In addition, Fazio said, some management companies build their new complexes with some smoke-free buildings. He expects that trend to continue.

In this economy, he said, "A lot of the apartment complexes can't afford to lose a potential resident."

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