

The Blade

Housing authority properties go smoke-free

Public event celebrates ‘quality of life’ change

BY LAUREN LINDSTROM, BLADE STAFF WRITER

Lucas Metropolitan Housing Authority properties will be smoke-free starting in May, the authority announced Wednesday.

The change was celebrated with a public event attended by housing and health officials, as well as public-housing residents.

“This initiative is to try to improve your quality of life,” said LMHA Executive Director Linnie Willis, speaking directly to LMHA clients.

Ms. Willis said the move is not meant to be punitive, but a move toward goals of overall wellness for residents, including the best air quality possible.

LMHA officials said it’s the only public housing organization in Ohio to make all of its buildings smoke-free. This is the second phase of the effort, dubbed the Great Smoke Out. The first phase, beginning in January, 2014, implemented a smoking ban at seven LMHA properties. Phase two extends the ban to all LMHA public housing units. The ban will not affect Section 8 units.

An addendum to lease agreements now prohibits smoking inside housing units. Residents will have access to smoking-cessation resources.

Martin LaMar, deputy executive director for LMHA, said the authority will work with residents to come into compliance, including with cessation programs. Residents could face eviction for violating the rules, but it won’t be a one-strike policy.

There will be signage alerting residents and guests of the smoke-free status, as well as designated smoking areas away from the buildings. Smokers will now have to be at least 20 feet away from authority properties before lighting up.

The smoke-free effort began in 2009 when the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development recommended that public housing units go smoke free, Ms. Willis said. Wednesday's announcement comes two years ahead of the 2017 goal to be entirely smoke free.

Deputy Fire Chief Brian Byrd thanked the authority for addressing both health and safety concerns related to smoking. He said firefighters see the impact of smoking as first responders to both fires and medical emergencies.

"The scope and the impact of the initiative is huge," he said. "Safety and wellness is the key to everything. We can't do anything else without safety and wellness."

Pamela Ashby, director of the HUD field office in Cleveland also lauded the effort and noted the "You will do better in Toledo" signs on her drive into town.

"When you know better, you do better," she said, adding that it is about "providing a healthy environment for residents, visitors, and employees of LMHA."

Several residents at the announcement event said they've heard rumblings of opposition from neighbors and other residents.

"It's going to take some getting used to," said Shirley White, 61, who is president of the resident council at Robert Dorrell Manor in South Toledo. "Some people have been smoking for 40, 50 years. But [LMHA is] providing them with literature and programs that

might help.”

Ms. White, a nonsmoker, said she believes it will be a good thing for residents in the long run.

“It’ll take teamwork from the those who smoke and those who don’t to work it out,” she said.

<http://www.toledoblade.com/local/2015/04/30/Housing-authority-properties-go-smoke-free.html#wI44o0VcwPqwS5hM.99>