

News Release

No Relief from Exposure to Second-Hand Smoke for Condo and Apartment Dwellers

Ottawa, January 16, 2009 - Ottawa tenants, landlords and condominium owners dealing with second-hand smoke infiltrating from neighbouring units don't have much to celebrate during this year's National Non-Smoking Week.

"It's appalling that some Ottawa residents have to resort to couch surfing because second-hand smoke from their neighbours' units has driven them out of their own homes," says Pippa Beck, President of the Ottawa Council on Smoking and Health.

"This year's theme for National Non-Smoking Week (January 18 to 24, 2009), is 'What Have You Got to Lose?'" explains Ms. Beck. "Tenants who are involuntarily exposed to second-hand smoke in their own homes suffer from serious health problems and tremendous psychological stress. Meanwhile, landlords can spend two to three times more money cleaning, maintaining, and repairing smoke- and fire-damaged apartment units compared to non-smoking units."

Second-hand smoke can seep into a unit from a neighbour's patio or balcony; through electrical outlets and ceiling fixtures; through the ventilation system; and through cracks around windows, floors, ceilings, and walls. The gases and particles from tobacco smoke that are absorbed by carpets, drapery, and furniture also pose a serious health risk.

Second-hand smoke kills more than 1,000 Canadians every year. Second-hand smoke contains more than 4,000 chemicals, including more than 50 that are cancer-causing. There is no safe level of exposure to second-hand smoke.

"Developers can legally declare their new building 100% smoke-free from the outset," states Ms. Beck. "Landlords can also legally adopt 100% smoke-free policies for their residential units, even private units. Surveys indicate that if given the choice, two-thirds of Ontarians living in multi-unit dwellings would prefer a smoke-free building. We believe that people should have the choice to live in buildings with no-smoking policies."

The issue of second-hand smoke in apartment buildings, condominiums, townhouses, and other housing units is gaining momentum across Canada. Private condominium and apartment buildings in Vancouver, Winnipeg, and the Toronto area have adopted 100% smoke-free policies. The Quebec Landlords Association supports adding a smoke-free clause to the standard apartment lease provided by the Quebec Rental Board. The City of St. John's, Newfoundland adopted a smoke-free policy for its non-profit housing last year. The City of Hamilton and the Region of Waterloo are also looking into the feasibility of no-smoking policies for their social housing.

However, Ottawa residents have very few smoke-free options for accommodation, if any at all.

“In early 2008, second-hand smoke seeping in from an adjacent apartment forced me to leave my condo unit,” says Ann O’Gorman. “I have not returned to my home since then. I am still living with friends.”

Ventilation systems and air purifiers cannot remove the toxins from second-hand smoke. A 100% smoke-free policy would protect residents in multi-unit dwellings and reduce their risk of heart attacks, strokes, cancer, and asthma exacerbations.

“Imagine the health benefits to Ottawa residents who desperately need 100% smoke-free housing,” says Ms. Beck. “There is an untapped market for smoke-free housing in Ottawa. Housing developers and landlords would not have any difficulty selling and leasing 100% smoke-free units.”

The Ottawa Council on Smoking and Health is a volunteer organization that aims to create a social environment where non-smoking is the norm; to assist in establishing smoke-free environments; to prevent youth from starting to smoke; to encourage smokers to quit; and to advocate for better smoking cessation resources.

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For more information:

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