

**Case Study**  
**The Ohio State University**  
**Smoke-Free Residence Halls**

The Ohio State University–Smoke-Free Residence Halls

Public university located in Columbus, Ohio

**Enrollment:** Approximately 50,000 students

**Fraternity and Sorority Membership:** Approximately 6% students

**Gender Breakdown:** Male: 52%, Female: 48%

**Racial Breakdown:** Caucasian: 86%, Hispanic/Latino: 2%, African American: 7%, Asian American: 5%, American Indian or Alaskan Native: <1%

**Summary:**

***Policy/Program Description:*** In September 2000, The Ohio State University (OSU) implemented a smoke-free policy for all residence halls. **Background.** The policy was spurred by health concerns about smoking and environmental tobacco smoke (ETS), as well as problems with roommate matching, roommate conflict, smoke damage, fire safety, and vandalism. **Strategy for Action.** Administrators consulted other benchmark schools, OSU students, and relevant campus groups while drafting the policy. Students were largely supportive of a 100% smoke-free living environment. **Outcomes.** There has been little resistance to the smoking ban. None of the fears expressed about flight from student housing or stigmatization of smokers materialized. **Future Plans.** OSU housing staff are encouraging students to develop appropriate perimeter policies for residence halls.

**Background:**

By the late 1990s, residence halls were the only campus buildings at The Ohio State University (OSU) where smoking was still permitted. In addition to health concerns, numerous smoking-related housing problems spurred OSU Housing staff to take action. (1) Matching smoking roommates and roommate conflict related to smoking was a key concern. (2) Smoking-related damage to student housing, fires in trashcans and other containers from cigarettes not properly extinguished, and false fire alarms were costing the school money. (3) Non-smoking students expressed concern about smoke traveling through building ventilation into their rooms.

**Strategy for Action:**

***Consulting Benchmark Schools.*** In the summer of 1999, the OSU Housing staff sent an email survey to their benchmark schools to ask about their residence hall smoking policies and to solicit advice about the best way to introduce this policy. OSU considered phasing in the smoking policy dorm-by-dorm, instead of introducing a blanket policy to

make all residence halls smoke-free simultaneously. However, most benchmark schools advised that a one-time 100% smoke-free policy works better than a phased-in approach. Thus, OSU decided that if the smoke-free policy were to be introduced, it would happen all at once.

***Consulting Students.*** Since a policy change would affect students' living environment, OSU Housing staff consulted students about the potential ban on smoking. They first approached the Residence Hall Student Government. Half of the council fully supported the ban, one quarter had a few reservations, and one quarter completely opposed the ban. Opponents cited smokers' rights and stigmatizing smokers as main concerns. In response to these concerns, OSU Housing staff held a campus-wide forum to gather input from interested students. When only 19 students showed up to discuss the issue, Housing staff concluded that this was not an issue for OSU students and decided to move ahead on the policy.

***Consulting Campus Staff.*** OSU Housing staff gathered input from other campus groups to assure that a policy change would be a coordinated effort. Residential Advisors (RAs) and other staff that lived in residence halls supported the policy change, but expressed concerns about enforcement. Housing staff also alerted the custodial and facilities staff to the policy proposal, and updated them on developments throughout the process. Finally, Admissions provided valuable input and effectively communicated the smoke-free policy change to prospective students.

***Changing Policy.*** With the support of the majority of students and staff, as well as advocacy from the Student Wellness Center, the Director of Housing implemented the smoke-free residence hall policy in fall 2000. While the Director of Housing had the authority to act single-handedly, consulting with students and staff assured greater cooperation with the policy change. Updated OSU publications reflected the policy change, and receptacles were placed outside of all dorms in preparation for increased outdoor smoking.

#### **Outcomes:**

The ban has been generally well-received on campus. Violations are rare. In the two years after the ban took effect, only 5-6% of all residence hall violations were smoking-related, suggesting student acceptance of the ban. While some students had threatened to move off-campus due to the policy, there has been no decline in demand for on-campus housing. Fears about the stigmatization of smokers have not materialized. In fact, some residence halls have since organized "smokers meetings" so that students who smoke may meet one another and socialize. The number of false fire alarms in the residence halls has dropped an estimated 15-20% since the ban took effect, saving both OSU and the Columbus Fire Department valuable time and money.

#### **Future Plans:**

An unresolved issue is the distance from residence halls within which smoking is prohibited. The new policy did not stipulate a smoke-free perimeter around campus buildings. Instead, this decision was left up to individual residence halls. To date, Hall

Councils have taken little action. Housing staff is encouraging students to take ownership of this issue, as complaints about walking through smoke in order to enter residence halls persist.

**Ohio State University's Smoke-Free Residence Hall Policy:**

***Smoking and the Use of Tobacco Products***

(a) Smoking is not permitted in the residence halls. This includes, but is not limited to, the following: student rooms, hallways, doorways, elevators, dining commons, reception areas, lobbies, lounges, restrooms, stairwells, loading docks, trash rooms, or computer areas.

(b) Residents are permitted to smoke outside in public areas that do not inconvenience or disturb other residents.

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