

Mecklenburg County Tobacco and Smoking Regulations

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What are the new “laws” that passed regarding smoking and tobacco use in Mecklenburg County?

On October 21, 2014, The Mecklenburg County Board of Commission passed two regulations that will become effective March 18, 2015:

- a. **Board of Health Rule for Smoke-Free Government Grounds** (includes buildings, vehicles and property owned by Mecklenburg County, the City of Charlotte and six townships (Cornelius, Davidson, Huntersville, Matthews, Mint Hill and Pineville). Smoke-free is defined as all *lighted* smoking products (combustible) such as cigarettes, cigars, pipes, hookahs and cigarillos.
- b. **County Ordinance for Tobacco-Free Parks** for the Mecklenburg County parks system which includes parks, greenways, recreation facilities and all park property. There were two areas exempted from the parks ordinance (will not be tobacco-free) including six golf courses owned by the county and operated by a private business, as well as nineteen regional parks. Of these regional parks, two (Bradford Park and US Whitewater Center) are smoke-free from other policies and three (Freedom Park, Matthews Sportsplex and Reedy Creek Park) will be tobacco free during special events. Tobacco-free is defined as all smoking products, as well as smokeless products (chew, dip, snuff) and electronic cigarettes.

2. Why have tobacco-free and smoke-free regulations?

Benefits - Everyone has the right to breathe clean air in public places. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), tobacco use and secondhand smoke exposure are leading preventable causes of illness and premature death in North Carolina and the nation. The Mecklenburg County Community Health Assessment continues to show year after year that chronic disease (heart disease, cancer, diabetes, COPD and respiratory disease, etc.) is a top health concern in our community. Tobacco use is a primary risk factor underlying these chronic diseases. There are solutions to the health and environmental impacts of smoking. After restaurants and bars became smoke free in NC, average weekly emergency room visits by people experiencing heart attacks decreased by 21%.

Tobacco use is the single most preventable cause of disease and death in North Carolina. This is a health and economic issue that affects everyone in Mecklenburg County. The current adult smoking rate in Mecklenburg County is 20%. If this number is cut in half, it would reduce the number of premature deaths in Mecklenburg County by nearly 600, and save the community almost \$350 million per year. The chronic diseases caused by tobacco use disproportionately affect those in the lowest socioeconomic groups, as they are twice as likely to use tobacco as the general population. These individuals are more likely to be uninsured, or to use taxpayer-funded insurance to treat these tobacco-related chronic diseases.

Dangers of secondhand smoke - Secondhand smoke contains more than 7,000 chemicals, hundreds of which are toxic (such as formaldehyde, arsenic and lead) and about 70 can cause cancer. In 2006, a report issued by the United States Surgeon General stated that the scientific evidence indicates that there is no risk-free level of exposure to secondhand smoke and that secondhand smoke has been proven to cause cancer, heart disease, and asthma attacks in both smokers and nonsmokers. The CDC advises that all individuals with

coronary heart disease or known risk factors for coronary heart disease should avoid all indoor environments that permit smoking.

Importance of Youth Tobacco Prevention – 90% of tobacco users start before the age of 18. Tobacco-free policies model and promote tobacco-free lifestyles and help to reduce the number of youth who pick up the habit.

3. Why is this Mecklenburg County's responsibility? Isn't smoking a personal choice?

Local boards of health have the responsibility to protect and promote the public's health and to adopt rules necessary for that purpose (N.C. Gen. Stat. 130A-39(a)). The Mecklenburg County Board of Commission, acting as the Board of Health, feels it is in the best interest of our citizens and those who visit Mecklenburg County to be provided with a healthy and smoke-free environment on all government property and tobacco-free environment in our parks, which promote community wellness and health for all citizens. Smoke-free laws help the seven out of every ten smokers who want to quit smoking by providing them with public environments free from any pressure or temptation to smoke.

There is support for people who want to quit smoking. Smokers can talk to their health care provider about quitting and ask about appropriate medications available through their health insurance plan or employee's insurer. They can also use the free quitting support services of QuitlineNC at 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669) or www.Quitline.com

4. How will these regulations be enforced?

The key to implementing these regulations is **signage and communication**. People cannot follow a policy unless they know about it. The county will work to strategically place signage on these properties, as well as communicate with all county and municipal employees and the public. Most outdoor policies depend upon the cooperation of the public – generally those who frequent the areas. Since most people will refrain from smoking if they know a smoke-free policy is in place, the best way to enhance enforcement is to educate the public and affected employees about the policy early and often in the implementation process.

However, both the Rule and the Ordinance do contain a civil penalty for violations after education and warnings take place. This penalty is a \$25 citation issued by a sworn law enforcement officer, with no associated court costs. Most communities report very few citations being issued, as most people comply when made aware of the regulations.

According to the NC Tobacco Prevention and Control Branch the State is currently receiving only 0 to 2 complaints per month about the Smoke-Free Restaurants and Bars Law. High compliance is based on education and clear communication.

5. When do these regulations become effective?

March 18, 2015.

6. Is smoking prohibited on sidewalks or at bus stops?

Sidewalks or "right of ways" that are adjacent to city, town and state roads are not covered by the Rule. Sidewalks within the parks (on park property) are covered by the Tobacco-Free Parks Ordinance but not sidewalks adjacent to roads or streets.

The CATS bus tops that are "enclosed" which are defined as having a top and three sides are covered and will be smoke-free. The bus stops that do not have cover or only have two sides and are open, are not smoke-free.

7. What about smoking in your private car on county, city or town property? Is this allowed?

Once you are on government-owned property, smoking will not be allowed, even if you are in your car. You will need to leave the property to smoke.

8. Will there be any designated smoking areas allowed on these properties covered by the Rule or the Parks Ordinance?

No, there will be no designated smoking areas. Experience shows that allowing designated for smoking or tobacco use dilutes or negates the public health impact of these regulations. The intent of these “laws” are to protect health and reduce the role modeling of tobacco use to youth, in an effort to reduce tobacco use.

Other communities that have enacted smoke-free and tobacco-free regulations show that some people will cut back or quit tobacco use when worksite and public restrictions are put into place. NC Health data shows that 69% of smokers have tried to quit in the past year. These regulations will support their quit and stay quit attempts.

9. Why are we concerned about tobacco use outside?

All tobacco-free policies, indoors or outdoors, encourage tobacco users to quit and help quitters stay tobacco-free. That’s because these policies de-glamourize and de-normalize tobacco use, helping it become less acceptable, and making it easier to quit and less appealing to start. Also, studies show that secondhand smoke can impact people as far away as 30 feet from the source. According to the US Surgeon General, there is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke. Tobacco-free and smoke-free policies promote healthy lifestyles as the norm for the community.

10. Which parks are exempted for the tobacco-free parks ordinance?

The 19 regional parks listed below are currently exempted with some exceptions as noted.

Park Name	Address	Notes
Bradford Park	17005 Davidson-Concord Road	Covered by Huntersville Smoke-Free Ordinance (they manage the park)
Berewick Park	5910 Dixie River Road	
Colonel Francis J. Beatty Park	4330 Weddington Road	
David B. Waymer Flying Park	15401 Holbrooks Road	
Freedom Park	2435 Cumberland Ave.	Tobacco-Free during special events *
Harrisburg Road Park	8045 Harrisburg Road	
Hornet’s Nest Park	6331 Beatties Ford Road	
Idlewild Road Park	10512 Idlewild Road	
Jetton Park on Lake Norman	19000 Jetton Road	
Mallard Creek Park	3001 Johnston Oehler Road	
Nevin Park	6000 Statesville Road	
Reedy Creek Park	2900 Rocky River Road	Tobacco-Free during special events / part of nature preserve that is always tobacco-free
Renaissance Park	1200 W. Tyvola Road	
Robert L. Smith Park	1604 Little Rock Road	
US National Whitewater Center	5000 Whitewater Center Pky	Smoke-free policy in place (via private company that manages the park)
William R. Davie Park	4635 Pineville-Matthews Road	
Elon Park	11401 Ardrey Kell Road	
McAlpine Creek Park	8711 Monroe Road	
Matthews Sportsplex	1601 Tank Town Road	Tobacco-Free during special events

* Special events are defined by the Mecklenburg County Director of Park and Recreation and include events such as festivals, concerts, sports tournaments

11. Where can I get additional information about this health initiative, as well as support if I need help in reducing or quitting tobacco use?

The Mecklenburg County Health Department is the lead agency in educating the community about these regulations and in linking tobacco users to quit help. Call 980-314-9064. The Health Department's Tobacco Free Meck webpage is:

<http://charmec.org/mecklenburg/county/HealthDepartment/CommunityHealthServices/TobaccoUse/Pages/TobaccoFreeMeck.aspx>.

See the Mecklenburg County [Quit Tool Kit](#).



Tobacco Free Mecklenburg is a local community coalition that supports tobacco prevention and control efforts. Follow them on Twitter (<https://twitter.com/TobaccoFreeMeck>) and Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/TobaccoFreeMeck>) for tobacco awareness education and helpful links.

For quit help, call 1-800-Quit-Now (1-800-784-8669) or visit online at www.quitline.com or talk to your HR representative if you have health insurance through your employer.