

Talking to People about Mecklenburg County Smoke-Free or Tobacco-Free Regulations

A brand new Board of Health Rule (or “law”) goes into effect **March 18, 2015** covering government grounds in Mecklenburg County, the City of Charlotte and the six towns in the county. Government grounds include buildings, county and municipal vehicles and all property owned by the county or municipalities. A county ordinance makes all Mecklenburg County parks and park property tobacco-free. There are a few exceptions that include the six county golf courses and some regional parks.

These regulations are enforced through signage, public education and communication.

These regulations apply to everyone - employees and the public.

Individuals who violate the Smoke/Tobacco-Free laws or policies will likely do so because they are unaware of it. Therefore, the first level of enforcement will be to respectfully inform the individuals about the policy and ask them politely to comply. The success of this health initiative depends upon the thoughtfulness, consideration, and cooperation of smokers/tobacco users and non-tobacco users alike. Use common sense in every situation. The encounter should be positive and not punitive or confrontational. Be empathetic!

One idea is to use the S-M-O-K-E approach*:

S – *Smile and introduce yourself in a friendly tone.*

M - *Make the assumption that the people do not know about the regulation and inform them of it – “you may not know about a new rule or policy on our property...”*

O – *Offer resources for more information: To learn more about the regulations, you can go to the website, **tobaccofreemeck.org**. For tobacco quit help, call **1-800-Quit-Now** or check with your health insurance plan as most offer free help. Offer quit help if it feels comfortable to the conversation.*

K - *Kindly remind them of the smoke-free or tobacco-free regulation (can call it a new law or a policy, or a RULE - whichever is comfortable in the conversation).*

E – *Enforce the policy. Kindly ask the individuals to not light up, to extinguish their cigarettes or turn off their e-cig or stop using whatever tobacco product they are using. If asked where they can smoke or use tobacco say, “You must now go off property to smoke or use tobacco.”*

**Adapted from Portland Community College (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ko3ZwXVYZX8>)*

Other Talking Points/Frequently asked Questions:

- **Why is the county addressing smoking and tobacco use?** This is a **wellness initiative** to address the number one cause of chronic disease and death in our community – tobacco use. One in five Mecklenburg County adults smoke and the use of other tobacco products among our youth is on the

rise (up from 25% to 29% in past two years). Laws or policies that restrict where you can smoke or use tobacco products help people who are thinking of quitting to quit, protect others from exposure to secondhand smoke and provide tobacco-free role modeling to our youth. Mecklenburg County is not the first community to restrict tobacco use in public. There are many examples showing that these strategies will reduce tobacco use.

- **How can you tell people they can't do a legal behavior?** We are not saying that people (over 18) cannot smoke or use tobacco. We are saying that they cannot do it on public property (government owned grounds) as defined by the regulations.
- **When does this go into effect?** Both of these regulations go into effect March 18, 2015 and apply to all hours of the day, seven days a week.
- **Who do these regulations apply to?** The Board of Health Rule and the County Ordinance apply to everyone – county, city and town employees, the public and any visitors to the properties identified in the regulations. County, city or town employees may have additional guidelines to follow based on their employers' HR policies covering tobacco use. Find out what that policy is from your employer.
- **What about designated areas on government grounds? Where can I smoke?** There will not be any designated smoking areas on county, city or town government property, or in the Mecklenburg County park system (except for the few exempted parks *when* there are no tobacco-free special events). You must go off property to smoke. The Rule does not include public sidewalks, adjacent to city or town streets.
- **Can I smoke in my car?** Not if you are on county, city or town property. You can smoke in your personal car if you are off county, municipal or park property.
- **How can this be enforced?** Through strategic and adequate signage, public education and communication. What happens over time is "social enforcement" and it becomes what people expect. We are not the first community to enact such laws. People learn that they cannot use tobacco in certain public places. Other examples include smoke-free restaurants and bars in NC, tobacco-free public schools, tobacco-free hospitals, tobacco-free community colleges, the Carolina Panthers stadium, etc. as well as many private businesses that have voluntarily adopted such policies.
- **Is there a penalty?** Both regulations do have a \$25 civil penalty – a ticket (with no court costs) can be written by a uniformed law enforcement officer. However, MOST people will comply when made aware of the rules.
- **Why does it matter that I smoke outside?** This is not just about exposure to secondhand smoke (which can occur outside if close enough to the smoke – if you smell it, you are being exposed), it is about role modeling a tobacco-free norm to our youth. 90% of adults started using tobacco before age 18. To reduce tobacco's toll on our community, we must influence kids not to start. When they

experiment, they can become addicted to nicotine, setting them up for potentially serious health problems.

- **But I didn't think e-cigarettes had tobacco in them – why are they included?** Electronic cigarettes and most e-hookahs contain cartridges with liquid nicotine. Because that nicotine is derived from tobacco, the state of North Carolina considers e-cigs a tobacco product. They are not allowed in tobacco-free parks. **Many employers**, including Mecklenburg County and the City of Charlotte **do not allow employees to use tobacco products** inside buildings or on their grounds.
- **What parks are exempted?** You can find a list of currently exempted regional parks at www.tobaccofreemeck.org. **Why were some parks not included in the tobacco-free ordinance?** There were compromises made to the parks ordinance to get broader support. The current ordinance is a measured step in the right direction. These parks could be added in the future if there is a majority of community support for it.
- **Where can I get help to quit?** Data shows that close to 70% of smokers tried to quit last year. Always check with your health insurance plan first. The NC Quitline or 1-800-Quit-Now (1-800-784-8669) is a great resource available 24 hours day, 7 days/week and is free to all youth and adults in NC. If you are uninsured, on Medicaid or Medicare, you get free nicotine patches. You can also visit www.quitlinenc.com on the web. Go to www.tobaccofreemeck.org for a quit guide.

Mecklenburg County Signs:



Tobacco-Free Parks -
Mecklenburg County Park
& Recreation System



Smoke-Free Government
Buildings, Vehicles and
Grounds – County, City of
Charlotte and six towns



CATS transit System –
Transit Centers, Buses, LYNX,
and LYNX light rail trail