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Campaign Announced to Promote Smoke-Free Apartment Policies

Responding to the many complaints received in recent years from tenants in apartments about secondhand smoke seeping into their units from adjoining apartments, as well as questions from landlords about their right to adopt smoke-free policies, the Washtenaw County Tobacco Reduction Coalition and the Smoke-Free Environments Law Project (SFELP) of The Center for Social Gerontology, Inc., (TCSG), today announced the initiation of a new campaign to encourage landlords to voluntarily adopt smoke-free policies in their apartment buildings.

The centerpiece of the smoke-free apartment campaign is a new web site called mismokefreeapartment.org which stands for "Michigan smoke-free apartment." The web site has two major sections – one targeted to landlords, and one to tenants.

The smoke-free apartment campaign includes a survey which will be mailed to landlords in early February to determine the current availability of smoke-free apartments. In addition, in coming weeks in certain localities in the state there will be a combination of billboards, radio ads, and a series of postcard mailings to landlords. Assistance in developing and implementing smoke-free apartment policies will be available from SFELP and the Washtenaw County Tobacco Reduction Coalition.

"Currently very few landlords are aware that they have a legal right to adopt smoke-free policies in their apartment buildings and that there is no 'right to smoke'. Likewise, most tenants are unaware of their rights to a smoke-free environment," stated Jim Bergman, TCSG Co-Director and director of SFELP. "It is our hope that landlords will take advantage of the information and assistance we are making available and will begin adopting smoke-free policies in their apartments, since this is an area in which voluntary action is preferable to enacting smoke-free apartment laws."

DeBorah Borden, Coordinator of the Washtenaw County Tobacco Reduction Coalition adds, "The information on the web site also makes it clear that going smoke-free saves money for landlords and makes for better relations among tenants. Inasmuch as the vast majority of tenants are not smokers, the market for smoke-free apartments is much larger than for smoky apartments with potential conflict among tenants. We receive many requests from people, especially those with asthma or other respiratory diseases, for information about the availability

of smoke-free apartments. Currently, we lack such information. Therefore, in early February, we will begin mailing a short survey to local landlords asking them to help identify smoke-free apartments currently on the market.” If they wish, those apartments can be placed on a list of smoke-free apartments that will be added to the mismokefreeapartment.org web site.

Jim Bergman of SFELP said that a series of postcards will also be mailed to landlords in late January and in the three next months informing them of the mismokefreeapartment.org web site and of the reasons they should consider adopting smoke-free apartment policies.

This is one of only a few such smoke-free apartment initiatives which have been undertaken in the United States. However, Bergman said, "this is the new frontier in combating the health hazards of secondhand smoke. According to the U.S. Public Health Service, secondhand smoke is a known carcinogen – a cancer-causing agent. Since the home is where people spend much of their time, people who live apartments and condominiums have a need and a right to be protected from secondhand smoke that insidiously creeps into their apartment from a neighboring unit. We expect, in the next few years, that smoke-free apartments will grow like wildfire and landlords will see this as a major selling point in advertising their apartments. We also expect newspapers will add 'smoke-free' to their classified listings to aid potential renters."

The smoke-free apartment campaign will begin in February in the following counties: Genesee; Ingham; Ogemaw; Sanilac; Washtenaw; and all 15 counties in the Upper Peninsula.

To access the web site to learn more, go to <http://www.mismokefreeapartment.org>. For additional information, go to the Apartments & Condominiums section of the SFELP site at <http://www.tcsg.org/sfelp/apartment.htm>. You may also go to the Washtenaw County Tobacco Reduction Coalition web page at www.publichealth.ewashtenaw.org.