

# Best Practices for School Tobacco Use Policies

Best practices for Maryland colleges and universities wishing to write a school tobacco use policy or update an existing policy are summarized below. This summary is drawn from the University of Michigan Standard Practice Guide Policies regarding smoking on university premises, the Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights Foundation's (ANRF) Model Policy for a Tobacco-Free College/University, and the ANRF's Tobacco-Free College Campus Initiative (TFCCI) Policy for a Tobacco-free Campus.<sup>1,2,3</sup>

Secondhand smoke contains over 7,000 chemicals, of which hundreds are toxic and nearly 70 are cancer-causing. Exposure can cause disease and premature death among children and adults who do not smoke.<sup>4</sup> According to the Surgeon General, there is no risk-free level of secondhand smoke exposure. The goal of any college or university tobacco use policy is to establish a healthy environment for community members, including but not limited to students, faculty, staff, and visitors, by protecting them from the harmful effects of secondhand smoke. Though a comprehensive **tobacco**-free policy is most effective, some schools may have support for a **smoke**-free policy only. This document serves as a guide, not as a mandate, for schools to establish a tobacco use policy.

## Establish Reasoning and Intention Behind the Policy

Establish the reason for implementing a school tobacco use policy. For instance, cite the environmental health risks of tobacco smoke to the school community (faculty, staff, students, fellows, visitors). To give context, the policy can reference the Maryland Clean Indoor Air Act of 2007, which prohibits smoking in virtually all indoor public places in an effort to limit exposure of residents to secondhand smoke.<sup>5</sup> In the policy, it is best to state explicitly the school's intention for instituting the policy. For example, "The policy will ensure a healthy, tobacco-free environment for community members." A reminder that school tobacco use policies such as these are the norm can also be helpful in school community acceptance of, and ultimately compliance with, the policy.

## Engage Both Smokers and Nonsmokers, Hold Everyone Responsible in the Policy

Include a section that is meant to engage smokers and nonsmokers alike. For example, this section could include a call to action via a sense of responsibility for one's community, consideration for nonsmokers, or common civility. This strategy is meant to engage the members of the school community who are to be held to this standard, gaining true support rather than begrudging acceptance. Within this section, the policy should clearly state who should be consulted if the policy is violated. For instance, "All community members are responsible for

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<sup>1</sup>Model Policy for a Tobacco-Free College/University. (2013) Retrieved from: <http://no-smoke.org/pdf/modeluniversitytobaccofreepolicy.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Standard Practice Guide Policies: Smoking on University Premises. (2011, June 1). Retrieved from: <http://spg.umich.edu/policy/601.04>

<sup>3</sup>Policy for a Tobacco-free Campus. (2015) Retrieved from: <http://tobaccofreecampus.org/sites/default/files/tobaccofreepolicy-template.pdf>

<sup>4</sup>*The Health Consequences of Smoking—50 Years of Progress: A Report of the Surgeon General*. Published January 17, 2014. US Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, National Center for Chronic Disease Prevention and Health Promotion, Office on Smoking and Health, Atlanta, Ga.

<sup>5</sup> Clean Indoor Air Act of 2007. (2007, May 17) Retrieved from: [http://mlis.state.md.us/2007RS/chapters\\_noln/Ch\\_502\\_hb0359E.pdf](http://mlis.state.md.us/2007RS/chapters_noln/Ch_502_hb0359E.pdf)

upholding and enforcing this smoke-free/tobacco-free policy. If any violations or concerns are raised, the individual aware of the violation or concern should consult the appropriate school representative for policy violations." The appropriate school representatives or governing body should be named explicitly, and should be those responsible for other school policy violations, such as school security, public safety office, or office of student affairs/life.

## Establish Clear, Exhaustive Definition of Tobacco Products in the Policy

Establish which tobacco products are prohibited in the school's tobacco use policy. It is best to be exhaustive and precise in listing which products are considered to be tobacco products and thus are prohibited. For example, "Tobacco products may include the following, but are not limited to: cigarettes, cigars, little cigars, cigarillos, snus, snuff, shisha, kreteks, bidis, dipping tobacco, and spitless tobacco." Additional prohibitions to consider may involve devices that include, but are not limited to: electronic nicotine delivery systems (e-cigarettes, e-hookahs, etc.), hookahs, and any other device that simulates smoking. Policies may include preemptive statements, for instance, prohibiting "any future device that simulates smoking." Policy exceptions should be limited to FDA approved smoking cessation products, such as nicotine patches and gum.

## Compose Comprehensive Rules and Regulations in the Policy

Define the scope of the policy and all settings and physical locations included (e.g., on all grounds, in all vehicles owned by the school, and in all facilities of the school) in the tobacco use policy. The most comprehensive tobacco-free policies prohibit use of tobacco products indoors as well as on all school-owned, leased, or controlled property. For instance, these policies prohibit tobacco use in any parking lots, any athletic facilities including stadiums or arenas, and in any vehicles including school-owned and personally-owned vehicles while on school grounds. Smoking is already prohibited statewide in all indoor public places on campus under the 2007 Maryland Clean Indoor Air Act, which should be clearly stated in the policy.

It is also a best practice to include in the policy a ban on the sale or purchase of tobacco products on school grounds or in any school building/facility. Consequences for violating the ban should be clearly stated.

## Limit Exceptions in the Policy

To maintain a 100% tobacco-free school, make no exceptions to the policy beyond those for use of FDA approved nicotine replacement therapy, such as nicotine gum or patch. Thus, the policy should clearly delineate which, if any, tobacco uses are not considered a violation of the policy. For example, use of tobacco in a controlled laboratory setting for research purposes or for religious ceremonies are commonly cited exceptions to school policies restricting tobacco use. Note that it is a best practice to disallow tobacco use for artistic expression, for example in a theatre production, in a school tobacco use policy as guided by the ANRF's Colleges and

Universities List Criteria.<sup>6</sup> If the policy does allow for exceptions, consider including a referral of whom to contact for consideration for an exception. For example, the policy might state, "Any students who feel they may warrant an exception should consult their academic or residential advisor."

## Clarify Consequences of Violating the Policy

Best practices recommend clarifying consequences of violating the school's tobacco use policy. Consequences may include, for example, any one or a combination of the following: a monetary fine, written warning, removal from school grounds, or an employee or student disciplinary hearing. Stating that the policy and the consequences of violating the policy pertain to all school community members and visitors can help maintain clarity for those enforcing and asked to comply with the policy. State whether disciplinary action may escalate for repeat violations. For ease of policy enforcement and implementation, consequences of the violation of the tobacco use policy should be in line with consequences of the violation of other school policies, such as a parking violation. Remember, under the Maryland State Clean Indoor Air Act, combustible tobacco use is prohibited in virtually all indoor public places, and therefore within most, if not all, buildings on school grounds.

## List Cessation Resources in the Policy

For those community members who are ready to quit using tobacco products, access to cessation services is an important part of compliance with this new or updated school tobacco use policy. List cessation services offered by the school, including those offered through the school health center, with contact information and associated websites. Remember to also list cessation services available from the community and state, especially those available at no cost, such as the Maryland Tobacco Quitline (available by phone at 1-800-QUIT-NOW, or online at <http://www.smokingstopshere.com>). Detailing the school-offered cessation services and the availability of other services conveys school support for those ready to quit using tobacco, and may increase compliance with the tobacco use policy.

## Provide Credibility for the Policy and its Enforcement

Demonstrating that the tobacco use policy has the full support of the school and its president or provost lends greater credibility to the policy and any disciplinary actions or consequences mentioned. For example, the policy may be signed by the president and/or provost, and announced and periodically promoted to the school community by school leadership and administration. It is a good idea to publicly note or announce if and when the policy has been updated or amended, to document continued endorsement.

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<sup>6</sup>Colleges and Universities List Criteria. (2013, November) Retrieved from: <http://www.no-smoke.org/pdf/CollegeCampusCriteriaTipsheetFinal.pdf>