

Smoke-Free Environments Law Project

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PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Health Groups Applaud First Centrum Communities as First National Apartment Development/Management Company to Adopt Smoke-Free Policy

"The landmark announcement today by First Centrum Communities that they are adopting a smoke-free policy for all 49 of their apartment communities in 6 states – MI, VA, MD, NC, TN & IL – is a giant step by a leader in the affordable housing field. No other major, national apartment development and management company has done this before. We applaud First Centrum for being a leader in adopting a policy to protect their residents from the health dangers of secondhand smoke and from the fire hazards caused by cigarettes," said Jim Bergman, the director of the *Smoke-Free Environments Law Project* (SFELP) of The Center for Social Gerontology, Inc., (TCSG), in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

First Centrum Communities announced that, effective September 1, 2006, all new residents in any of their 49 apartment communities will sign leases which state that they and their guests will not smoke anywhere inside the apartment building, including in their apartment, or anywhere on the grounds. First Centrum Communities manages 5,452 apartment units in 6 states; MI has 15 buildings, VA has 16, MD has 10, while NC has 6 and TN and IL have 1 each. In 2005, First Centrum was among the 35 largest Senior Housing Managers in the nation, according to American Seniors Housing Association. For specific cities and buildings go to www.firstcentrumcommunities.com although not all the sites are currently on the web site. (The First Centrum press release is included below.)

The catalyst for the adoption of this new policy was the request by residents at the Courthouse Square apartment building in Ann Arbor, MI for a smoke-free building. Working with them were the Smoke-Free Environments Law Project and the Fair Housing Center of Southeastern Michigan. Together, they approached First Centrum's management and explained the health and business reasons why a smoke-free policy made sense for residents and First Centrum. After completing a thorough analysis of the proposal, First Centrum concluded that a smoke-free policy would create a healthier community and would benefit everyone. While the new policy applies only to new tenants, over a short period of time, all the buildings will become totally smoke-free as current residents who are smokers move out.

Ruth Darcy, a resident of the 116-unit Courthouse Square apartments in Ann Arbor said: "I came to Courthouse Square because from the moment I heard it was going to be made into senior apartments, I determined to live there the rest of my life. I brought with me, six and a half years ago, about 40 years' experience as a counselor -- my specialties: depression, crisis, and community issues. When I joined the advocacy group for making Courthouse Square a smoke-free building, I expected another long drawn out bureaucratic process, but to my surprise, and true delight, First Centrum was amazingly responsive to our needs. Now it looks like, over the next while, our environment will gradually become one in which we can we can actually breathe freely. Since my floor was the first to become smoke-free, I know the relief of not having smoke coming in every time the door opens, and the freedom from having to use multiple asthma medications."

"This is a great step nationally for ensuring nonsmokers' right to breathe smoke-free air," said Cynthia Hallett, Executive Director of *Americans for Nonsmokers' Rights*. "We applaud First Centrum Communities for its leadership."

"We applaud First Centrum Communities for taking this significant step to protect its residents from the serious, proven dangers of secondhand smoke and also to reduce the risk of cigarette-caused fires, the leading cause of fire deaths in the United States," said Matthew L. Myers, President of the *Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids*. "First Centrum's new policy is an appropriate response to the overwhelming evidence, confirmed by the recent Surgeon General's report, that secondhand smoke causes serious diseases and premature death in both children and nonsmoking adults. We welcome First Centrum to the growing movement to protect everyone's right to breathe clean, smoke-free air."

Susan Dusseau, chairperson of *Tobacco Free Michigan* and a resident of Midland, Michigan where First Centrum manages an apartment building, said: "We know that breathing tobacco smoke causes a host of illnesses and exacerbates others. I'm very pleased that First Centrum has stepped up to be counted as part of the solution to this serious health problem by making all of their apartment buildings smoke-free. Tobacco Free Michigan congratulations First Centrum on their leadership."

"First Centrum's voluntary adoption of this common sense policy demonstrates that the cooperative and collaborative approach between public health advocates and the business community is an efficient and effective approach to improving public health and safety.

Adoption of the policy means that smoke-free apartment living will be a reality soon for many Maryland residents. We issue kudos to First Centrum and an invitation to other apartment management companies to discuss adoption of a policy for their communities," said Kathleen Dache of the *University of Maryland's Center for Tobacco Regulation, Litigation & Advocacy*.

To learn more, go to <http://www.mismokefreeapartment.org>. For additional information, go to the *Apartments* and *Condominiums* sections of the SFELP site at <http://www.tcsg.org/sfelp/apartment.htm> and <http://www.tcsg.org/sfelp/condos.htm>

The Center for Social Gerontology, Inc. (TCSG), since its inception in 1972, has been a non-profit research, training and social policy organization dedicated to promoting the individual autonomy of older persons and advancing their well-being in society. TCSG has operated the Smoke-Free Environments Law Project since 1999 to protect persons of all ages from the dangers of secondhand smoke. www.tcsg.org www.tcsg.org/sfelp/home.htm

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Room to Breathe — First Centrum Communities Announces Non-Smoking Policy for its Apartment Homes

STERLING, VA, July 31, 2006 Soon, residents of all Centrum Management managed apartment homes will have more “breathing room” as a non-smoking policy is implemented on September 1, 2006. This represents the property management industry’s first major move to a non-smoking environment with over 5452 apartment homes impacted by the change.

The decision to become smoke-free is being made to improve the quality of life for all residents of a First Centrum Communities apartment home. In addition, this move will assist in protecting the health of the vast majority of First Centrum Communities’ residents whose age and medical condition often make the presence of second-hand smoke an issue for them. Respiratory illness and the requirement for use of oxygen are all too common circumstances for many residents of First Centrum facilities.

The risk of fire caused by smoking materials not properly extinguished will be also be eliminated as the policy takes full effect. This is an obvious benefit and safety enhancement for all residents. From a purely economic standpoint, turnover costs will be lessened due to less need for extra cleaning and painting of apartments vacated by smokers.

No one currently residing in a First Centrum apartment will be required to move out. Current applicants who may smoke will not be affected, either. After September 1, 2006, all new applicants must adhere to the non-smoking rules. The buildings will eventually be completely non-smoking as attrition eliminates those who now smoke.

“We are pleased to be able to help protect the health and improve the lives of our residents and to enhance the atmosphere of our buildings at the same time,” states Rob Couch, President of Centrum Management, LLC, which provides direct management, as well as third party oversight for the communities involved in the transition. First Centrum, LLC, owner of most of the affected communities, is a leader in the development, construction and operation of senior housing. It was formed in the 1970’s and is based in Sterling, Virginia.

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