



Smells Don't Sell

By Jo Becker, Education/Outreach Specialist, Fair Housing Council of Oregon

As a former Realtor®, I can tell you that we've all had 'em, listings with odors that are so strong they offend olfactory senses. Perhaps you've toured properties for sale that were old and stale, shut up for far too long. Maybe you considered purchasing an investment home with the pungent smell of cat urine that had seeped into the carpet and the underlay. As an onsite apartment manager, maybe you've dealt with the pungent odors of various spices and cuisines that waft into neighbors' units. I for one listed a home that was inundated with the smell of wet dogs... even after several carpet cleanings, air filtration treatments, and even a complete paint job!

Perhaps one of the most persistent smells that can pervade a home or apartment is cigarette smoke. Walt Molony of the National Assn. of Realtors® concurs, "the smell of cigarettes can be a turnoff to potential buyers." It hangs around—both in the air and on surfaces—making it a terrible chore to clean and uninviting to many would-be buyers or renters.

According to *The Chicago Sun-Times*, a typical clean up for a 2,100 square foot home is \$2,500. A major cleaning, including painting and cleaning of ductwork costs \$12,000. If these costs are left to the buyer, this may deter them from purchasing the home or apartment building. Not only is it smelly and insidiously hard to clean, many believe third-hand smoke—the residue left on walls, carpeting, furnishings, drapes, even light bulbs—may be toxic.

Did you know that 72% of US homes have "smokefree rules?" Here in the Northwest, 87% of Oregonians and 88% of Washingtonians have set such rules for their homes. These figures indicate that the majority understands the importance of breathing clean air.

While the local rental industry has taken quickly to the trend of touting no-smoking rules, it's a tactic those trying to sell a residential investment property would be well advised to consider as well. Given the hassle of cleaning a home that has been smoked in, the struggle to market it for sale, and the high demand for "smokefree" homes (not to mention the currently slow sales market), why not take advantage of those properties you have that do not suffer such maladies! Tout your "smokefree" property as such. Certainly, only new construction or, perhaps, a one-owner home where you did not allow smoking could literally claim to be smokefree, but if the property has been cleaned and well prepared for the market by having gotten rid of the smoke smell and residue, I'd certainly promote that fact, especially in a slow sales market!

What if you're facing the prospect of selling a smoked-in home? The Portland-Vancouver Metro Area Smokefree Housing Project offers an excellent resource entitled "Restoring a Smoke-Damaged Apartment" on their website smokefreehousingNW.com (look under Landlords / Landlord Resources). While written for the rental market, the tips and steps offered are equally beneficial for single-family homes and apartment buildings being sold. The Housing Project is a collaboration of the American Lung Association of Oregon and the Multnomah, Clackamas, and Clark County (WA) Health Depts.

As the trend toward no-smoking homes grows, you will even find condos for sale where the condo association has enacted no-smoking policies in all or part of the community, much like apartment complexes are doing now. Again, a great amenity to tout to buyers—be it those with

respiratory problems or allergies made worse by smoke, or those simply seeking a healthy living environment.

No-smoking rules in condos, homeowners' associations, and apartment buildings? Is that legal? Well, smoking is not a protected class under federal, state, or local fair housing laws¹. Apartment owners and managers as well as homeowners and owners within an association have every right to enact and enforce no-smoking or limited-smoking rules, just as they would a no-pets policy or other similar rules.

For a wealth of information on no-smoking policies in housing, visit: smokefreehousingNW.com. There you'll find information specific to buying and selling.

If you have questions about fair housing laws—what is protected, what isn't, what does illegal housing discrimination look like, etc.—please let us know. That's what we're here for! Call the Fair Housing Hotline at 800/424-3247 or EM me at jbecker@FHCO.org.

This article brought to you by the Fair Housing Council; a nonprofit serving the state of Oregon and SW Washington. Learn more and / or sign up for our free, periodic newsletter at FHCO.org.

Qs about your rights and responsibilities under fair housing laws?

Visit FHCO.org or call 1-800-424-3247 Ext. 2.

Qs about this article? Want to schedule an in-office fair housing training program or speaker for corporate or association functions?

Contact Jo Becker at jbecker@FHCO.org or 503/453-4016.

Have property to promote?

Advertise vacancies or for-sales free across the Portland / Vancouver market at HousingConnections.org!

¹ Federally protect classes under the Fair Housing Act include: race, color, national origin, religion, sex, familial status (children) and disability. Oregon law also protects marital status, (legal) source of income, and sexual orientation (inclusive of gender identity). Washington law covers martial status, sexual orientation, and honorably discharged veterans and those with military status. Additional protected classes have been added by local jurisdictions; visit FHCO.org for further information.