



St. Mary's County Health Department

NEWS RELEASE

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HEALTH DEPARTMENT ANNOUNCES NEW SMOKE-FREE CAMPUS POLICY

New policy goes into effect February 1, 2008

LEONARDTOWN, MD (December 19, 2007) -- St. Mary's County Health Department will implement a tobacco and smoke-free campus policy for all employees, visitors, customers and volunteers beginning on February 1, 2008. On that date no tobacco use of any kind will be permitted inside the building or on the grounds and parking lots of the health department. The health department has long prohibited smoking in its building, but is going the additional step to further provide a safe and healthy environment to everyone who visits its office in Leonardtown.

The new policy means that use of tobacco products will be prohibited anywhere on the campus. The new rule applies to smoking in personal vehicles on the property as well as on sidewalks or streets within the boundaries of the campus. The policy will coincide with implementation of the 2007 Clean Indoor Air Act, which will prohibit smoking in bars and restaurants in the state of Maryland.

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Every Maryland health department strongly supported the 2007 Clean Indoor Air Act, and many are now opting to become smoke-free campuses, said Dr. William B. Icenhower, the County's health officer. "As this county's public health leader, I have chosen to make our campus smoke free, and in doing this, further promote the good health of our employees and clients, and set the highest standard for health awareness in our community."

Speaking with his own employees at a staff meeting earlier this month, Icenhower noted, "It's easier to convince others of the need to eliminate smoking if we are willing to be a model for smoke-free lifestyle ourselves. I believe it is simply the right thing to do."

St. Mary's County Health Department will be providing Smoking Cessation programs to employees who may wish to quit smoking as a result of the new policy. "Quitting smoking is never easy, but luckily there are many effective treatments to help people stop smoking, said Karen Russell, Wellness and Health Promotion Program manager at the health department. "Employees will be provided free group counseling and medications to increase their chances of success."

The St. Mary's Nursing Center, which is a close neighbor to the health department and has an adjoining parking lot with the agency is aware of the new policy and will be asking employees, visitors and guests of the center to be mindful of the health department's rules. Signs will be located on the campus as you enter Peabody St. reminding all visitors of the policy.

By making the campus environment completely smoke free, St. Mary's County Health Department is addressing the number one health risk today. According to the American Cancer Society, last

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year alone, there were 10,400 cancer deaths in the state of Maryland. Nationally cigarette smoking accounts for at least 30 percent of all cancer deaths. Smoking is also a major cause of heart disease, aneurysms, bronchitis, emphysema, and stroke, and it makes pneumonia and asthma worse. Today, smoking related diseases remain the most preventable cause of death in our society.

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