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Oakland adopts smoke-free policy in residence halls

By *Kalee Iacoangeli*, OU Student Writer

As a reflection of an increasingly health-conscious society, growing resident concerns about smoking have led Oakland University to once again change its policy in the residence halls.

Each year the House Policy Committee and the Director of University Housing, Eleanor Reynolds, meet to review and discuss all the different policies within the residence halls. In the fall of 2003, it was announced that three of the six halls would be smoke-free environments, and now beginning in the fall of 2004, all residence halls will embrace the nonsmoking policy.

"We were seeing the same issues arise as we did last year," Reynolds said. "Because of the shared air systems and the shared living space, the smoke was seeping through to other rooms and there was no way around that except to go completely smoke-free."

Oakland is one of many Michigan universities adopting completely smoke-free residence hall policies in response to student concerns. Grand Valley State University, Saginaw Valley State University and the University of Michigan all recently enacted nonsmoking policies as well.

OU junior Latoya Hearn is one of the many residence hall students who support the new policy.

"When people smoke, it goes up into other people's rooms and you can smell it," Hearn said. "I want to be able to open my window and smell fresh air instead of nicotine."

The communal air space appears to have been the students' main concern, but health reasons also motivated a change in policy.

"I think it's a great idea especially because of those students who have allergies or other health problems," sophomore Lindsay McCullough said. "My nonsmoking doesn't affect others health, but their smoking does affect mine."

Although the new smoking ban is overwhelming supported by a majority of students and staff, some feel the 2003 policy, which gave students an option to live in either a smoking or nonsmoking hall, should have remained.

"I think that they should have left it the same as it was last year," said resident assistant Steve Townsend. "The people who smoke are going to do it anyway. It could just create more issues with the smoking students."

"You're going to have problems and complaints either way," said resident assistant Laura Christensten. "Being a former smoker, I know how rough it was to have to constantly go somewhere else to smoke. I think that there is going to be a lot more illegal smoking and issues with smokers than if they would have kept the policy like it was last year."

The creation of more issues from smoking students also was a concern for resident assistant Ryan Donnellon.

"It could actually create more complaints from non-smokers because people are going to smoke in their rooms anyway," Donnellon said. "Last year, some people overlooked smoking or the smell of it because there were a few buildings that had smoking floors and I think there was confusion about which ones those were. Now any little hint of it is going to cause even more complaints."

Even with the possibility of more complaints and harder rule enforcement, Donnellon believes the new policy will be a good change and will eliminate the uncertainty about where resident students can and cannot smoke.

"You aren't going to be able to please everyone," he said. "It will definitely help clear up any confusion, and I think that

as long as there is an alternative for them (smokers), it should be fine.”

Despite some minor objections to the smoke-free policy, Reynolds is confident the new rule will go over well with a large majority of the resident students.

“There are so many public places that are smoke-free now that I really don’t think the change is going to be that big of a deal,” Reynolds said. “We have fewer and fewer students identifying themselves as smokers and so this new policy just makes the most sense.”

For more information on OU's residence halls, see the [Housing and Dining](#) Web site.

SUMMARY

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