



## **Cornell Estates Implements a 100% Tobacco-Free and Smokefree Campus**

**Hillsboro, Oregon**

**October 1, 2013**

Cornell Estates is a privately-owned retirement and assisted living facility in Hillsboro, Oregon. It was founded in 1989 with a vision that seniors deserve a gracious, respectful, and dignified lifestyle. To fulfill that vision, Cornell Estates developed their philosophy: “to hear and acknowledge you, our residents, and to preserve your dignity.” Cornell Estates houses 160 apartments in total, 100 are retirement apartments and 60 are assisted living apartments. Cornell Estates has approximately 135 current residents, frequent visitors and approximately 60 employees.

### The Challenge

The Oregon Indoor Clean Air Act (ICAA) prohibits smoking cigarettes in most workplaces, however it does not include private residences. This means the common areas and facility of Cornell Estates were smokefree by law, but the private residence apartments were not required to follow this rule. Cornell Estates had already expanded the ICAA and prohibited smoking in all facilities including all apartments, allowing smoking on patios and outdoors. Their “designated smoking area” was in the common area of an outdoor courtyard. The courtyard appeared to be an attractive and clean outdoor area that residents frequented for leisure. It included benches, lawn, flowers, garden décor, walking path and a 3-foot tall cigarette ash receptacle placed prominently between the only two benches in the courtyard. Kitchen staff and employees smoked more frequently outside of kitchen doors and in back of the facility. Cigarette butt litter was prevalent in these areas, near garbage cans and landscaping. Employees had been spoken to about the litter but the problem still existed.

### The Solution

Cornell Estates Executive Director, Charlene Torrey, stated “*we are a health service community that encourages a healthy and full lifestyle; allowing smoking and tobacco use doesn’t fit our values.*” Torrey was very committed to adopting a campus smoking policy to protect the health of staff and the high-risk population they serve. When Pacific University student Pam Blevins approached Torrey about a Master’s degree internship, research for adopting a tobacco-free campus policy began. In June 2013, Blevins began working with Carla Bennett, Washington County tobacco prevention and education program (TPEP) coordinator for technical expertise and assistance with policy adoption and implementation.

As partners, Blevins and Bennett assessed the needs of Cornell Estates and concluded that the best solution was to adopt a 100% tobacco-free AND smokefree policy. Bennett drafted a policy and policy language for the employee handbook and dress code, as well as language to update the resident and assisted living rental agreements.

The policy stated Cornell Estates would become 100% tobacco-free and smokefree on October 1, 2013. It prohibits smoking and use of all forms of tobacco or nicotine product on any owned, leased or rented property of Cornell Estates, nor during any event sponsored by Cornell Estates. Smoking is defined as “smoke or vapor emitting from an electronic-cigarette, tobacco or any other substance, or carrying a lighted or smoldering substance.” The employee dress code further limits tobacco use by prohibiting employees from using tobacco at any point of the day, from start of shift to end of shift, including breaks and from smelling of tobacco or cigarettes.

Bennett and Blevins finalized the policies, gathered cessation resources and materials, and presented the policy at a manager’s meeting. Further, Blevins created an updated dress code signature page so when Torrey and Bennett presented at the all-staff meeting, employees were able to sign in acknowledgement of the new policy. The updated dress code page was included into the employee handbook and the previous smoking policy was updated to reflect a 100% tobacco-free and smokefree campus policy.

The resident and assisted living handbooks were updated and the old smoking policy language was removed. Cornell Estates put an announcement in the resident newsletter and in billing statements. They also personally connected with residents, and their families, who were identified as current smokers to provide additional support during the transition. They hosted a celebratory event on October 1, 2013 and had all residents sign an updated policy. The new resident marketing packet was also updated to include the tobacco-free and smokefree policy.

### Success

Adopting the policy was mostly seamless. Out of nine identified smoking employees, five stated they were going to try to quit. Residents and staff were mostly all in support of the policy when it was first announced. Families of residents seemed to be strongly supportive of this new change. This was a timely policy as a high percentage of prospective new residents were seeking tobacco-free retirement and assisted living environments. This policy has been a valuable and positive marketing tool to communicate to prospective residents.

Blevins stated “The most exciting part was the resources in Oregon for smokers to quit and the support available (county TPEP) for creating tobacco-free and smokefree areas. It was also exciting to have a business voluntarily go tobacco-free, and because the implementation of the policy during work hours, has directly resulted in employees wanting to quit.”

The comprehensive property policy eliminated the concern of creating and designating safe and accessible smoking areas to cater to smoking residents, specifically assisted living residents. Employees had been tasked with escorting residents to smoke, putting them at risk of secondhand smoke exposure multiple times per day to carry out the responsibilities of their job. The policy has mitigated cigarette butt litter and the expense of clean-up, especially around kitchen and back areas that were densely covered in litter.

One unforeseen success through this project was that it identified the need to update the employee handbook, as well as streamline storage of their policies and documentation into one, central and accessible location. The computers hadn’t been networked or backed up and this policy assessment helped identify a needed systems change.