



N.C. Smoke-Free/Tobacco-Free Government Buildings, Grounds and Parks

Taking a Different Route to Make Chatham County Tobacco-Free

Summary

Starting in 2014, the Chatham County Public Health Department took a step-by-step approach to solidify its county-wide, tobacco-free grounds starting with a tobacco-free administrative policy and moving toward the adoption of a Chatham County Board of Commissioners (BOC) tobacco-free grounds ordinance in 2019.

Challenge

For many years, progress toward adopting a comprehensive policy had run into issues like timing and the need to build support and awareness. Building this support would depend on convincing others that tobacco-free policies are one of the best tools we have to protect the public and employees from the dangers of secondhand smoke and e-cigarette aerosol, encourage individuals to quit tobacco (or support their quit efforts), and discourage youth from starting to use tobacco. These policies also show the next generation of young people that tobacco use is not the norm and that we do not want them to grow up addicted to tobacco products.



Solution

Chatham County's tobacco-free grounds policy was implemented first as an administrative policy with the intention to transition the policy into an ordinance in the future. Policies are easily modifiable and adaptable, and it gave us time to

resolve any problems or concerns we encountered. The county's administrative tobacco-free policy was approved by the county manager in July of 2015 and went into effect on March 1, 2016. The policy expanded the former policy to include electronic cigarettes and other vape products and to cover all county grounds and parks instead of the previous 50-foot perimeter around buildings. As soon as the policy went into effect, metal signs were put up at all county properties and promotional materials were distributed to each office. After three years of the administrative policy the county was ready to move forward and solidify these efforts through a formal ordinance. We had gained the trust and support of county Human Resources, Department Heads, and fellow employees, who understood we had the best interests of everyone in mind. We also had the time to form a tobacco-free working group made up of diverse group county employees that collectively worked on issues and ideas to continuously improve the policy.

Quotes

"This is a model that we really want to continue to perpetuate. We really want Chatham to be on the cutting edge of tobacco issues and public health. It sends a message that Chatham County really cares about the health of its citizens."

Layton Long, Jr., Recently Retired Chatham County Public Health Director

"Having a tobacco-free policy from our manager's office first gave us time to work with our county employees and the public before the official county ordinance became law. It eased in a lot of our employees that were on the fence about quitting. It gave us the time needed to make sure we did it right and allowed being tobacco-free a part of our culture here in Chatham."

Carolyn Miller, Director of Human Resources for Chatham County

County Human Resources also created a tobacco-free incentive policy rewarding employees who were either tobacco-free or enrolled in a cessation program. Having an administrative policy helped lay the needed groundwork and made the decision to approach the Board of Health (BOH) and BOCC much more manageable for the health department.

Results

Chatham County's grounds officially became tobacco-free through a county ordinance on January 1, 2020. The Chatham County BOCC adopted a tobacco-free ordinance that covers all county owned, leased, or otherwise maintained buildings, vehicles, and grounds, including park and recreation areas. This ordinance also bans the use of electronic cigarette products in these areas. Taking the time to create tobacco-free grounds set a positive example for our residents and local municipalities to encourage them to develop their own policies. The Siler City Town Council most recently passed a tobacco-free ordinance that went into effect January 1, 2020, creating 100% tobacco-free park and recreation facilities. Tobacco-free recommendations were also included in the Chatham County Comprehensive Plan, the Chatham County Parks and Recreation Master Plan, and the Town of Pittsboro Parks and Recreation Master Plan.

Lessons Learned



One size does not fit all when it comes to enacting tobacco-free grounds policies. There are many ways to get an ordinance or Board of Health rule adopted but it takes a lot of creativity, partnerships, and perseverance to make it to the finish line. It is worth it.

Celebrating the tobacco-free ordinance: (Left to Right) George Gregor-Holt, Chatham Drug Free; Carol Reitz-Barlow, Chatham BOH; Anna Stormzand, Chatham County Public Health Department; and L. Layton Long, recently retired Chatham County Public Health Director

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To learn more about smoke-free policies in N.C., visit www.tobaccopreventionandcontrol.ncdhhs.gov.



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