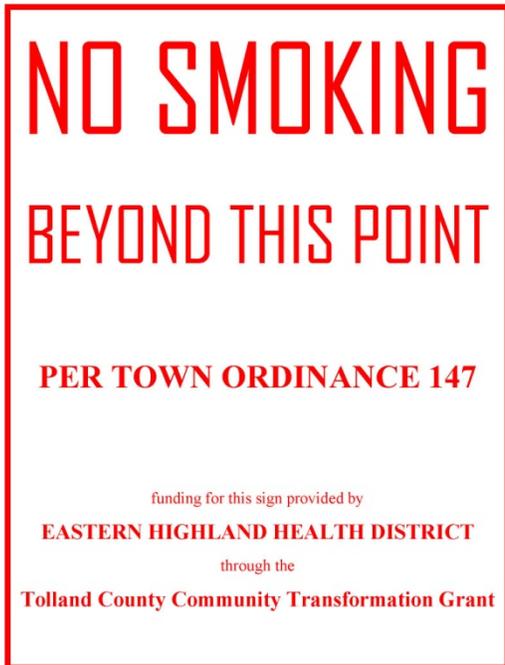


Harnessing the Power of Advocacy to Create Smoke-free Environments in Ellington CT

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TOLLAND COUNTY CONNECTICUT



For the first time in years, residents will not need to worry about cigarette butts in Crystal Lake this summer and Ellington residents can breathe easier without fearing exposure to secondhand smoke when they attend functions in town. I am very proud of our effort and I am grateful to the Ellington Board of Selectmen for their resolve.

- Tom Stauffer, Ellington resident
and Boy Scouts leader

Summary

Tobacco remains one of the largest public health threats in Connecticut. A group of concerned residents of Ellington, a small rural town in Tolland County, Connecticut worked closely with their parks and recreation commission, their local health districts, the American Lung Association, and their local elected representatives to present evidence that a smoking ban would benefit all town residents and visitors. Their actions resulted in the adoption of a smoke-free ordinance by their board of selectmen that includes police enforcement, a public awareness effort, and signage placed in every public open area in town.

Challenge

In Connecticut, 16% of residents 18 years and older—over 428,000 individuals—are current cigarette smokers. Despite successes made, tobacco is still responsible for killing more Connecticut residents than AIDS, drugs, homicide, and suicide combined (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2014). Studies have shown that secondhand smoke kills; in fact, secondhand smoke causes approximately 55,000 deaths per year among nonsmokers (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention; 2014).

The Environmental Protection Agency has classified secondhand smoke as a *Class A Carcinogen*. This category is reserved for the most dangerous cancer causing chemicals and it includes such toxins as benzene and asbestos. The *2010 Surgeon General's Report* concluded there is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke. Outdoors, cigarette smoke can be smelled up to 23 feet away. If people can smell smoke, they are inhaling cancer-causing and toxic chemicals.

Get Involved

Everyone in the town of Ellington, CT and anyone in Tolland County, CT who cares about the beautiful outdoor recreational opportunities for the use and enjoyment of families and visitors can become an advocate against secondhand smoke and the elimination of unsightly and unhealthy litter. This gives residents the opportunity to model tobacco-free behavior – a powerful tool in teaching children how to be healthy adults.

Solution

For many years, residents of the Town of Ellington, CT had been organizing to discuss possible solutions for a problem most of them hated to deal with—the exposure to secondhand smoke in open public areas and the litter created by cigarette butts in their Crystal Lake beach area. Smoking seemed to be a general annoyance to most residents and an issue of grave public health concern to many.

With support from impassioned town residents and members of the parks and recreation commission, the local health district, North Central District Health Department (NCDHD), and Eastern Highlands Health District (EHHD), which serves as the local public health agency for ten area towns in Tolland County and recipient of a 2011 Community Transformation Grant from the CT Department of Public Health, initiated a process that culminated in the adoption of a smoke free ordinance for the Town of Ellington, which was adopted by their Board of Selectmen in August 2013. ***The ordinance prohibits the use of cigarette and other smoking products in any building, park, playground, recreation area, athletic facility, trail, beach or area of assembly owned, leased or controlled by the town of Ellington. In addition, it empowers the Ellington Police Department with enforcement.***

It was crucial to start this effort working with a group of residents that cared deeply about this issue and wanted to take action. It was equally important to get support from the American Lung Association (ALA) who testified alongside EHHD in the initial public hearings before the Board of Selectmen. The ALA and EHHD staff presented a no cost appeal to local officials by emphasizing the public health concerns of exposure to secondhand smoke and the health benefits that town residents would be able to enjoy by their action. EHHD paid for the signage to be placed in all of the locations such as buildings, parks, playgrounds, recreation areas, athletic facilities, trails, and beaches owned, leased, or controlled by the town of Ellington. This accomplishment was only possible through the committed work of town residents and the support they received from local and state agencies.

Residents of Ellington (approximately 15,600) will benefit from the actions taken by their board of selectmen by adopting a smoke-free ordinance. In addition, visitors from surrounding towns who frequent parks, playgrounds, recreation areas, athletic facilities, trails and beaches owned, leased, or controlled by the town of Ellington will also be able to enjoy smoke-free environments.

Sustainable Success

The posted *No Smoking* signs, police enforcement of the ordinance, continued community education, and town staff education are sustainable and will continue to increase awareness of the ordinance among users of all of these locations providing continuity to what has been accomplished.

NCDHD and EHHD remain committed to continuing community education efforts to assist the town of Ellington succeed in its efforts to maintain smoke-free environments.

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