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## 3 counties work to get smoke-free apartments

Half of metro area renters would consider moving to a nonsmoking apartment, according to a new survey.

By **WARREN WOLFE**, Star Tribune

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Three metro counties will spend about \$204,000 from state health-improvement grants over the next two years to help apartment landlords and renters make their buildings smoke-free.

They start the effort with a survey showing that half of local renters would consider moving to a smoke-free building, including 16 percent of smokers.

"We know that many people want to live in smoke-free environments, and we know that can improve public health," said Lisa Mueller, who administers the state grants for Hennepin County.

Hennepin, Ramsey and Dakota counties, as well as Minneapolis, are pooling part of their

state grants to hire the nonprofit Association for Nonsmokers Minnesota to advise them on voluntary non-smoking efforts in multi-unit housing.

The association used part of that grant money to conduct the renters survey. It was conducted by Wilder Research and released to coincide with the annual Great American Smokeout, a stop-smoking effort started in 1974 in Minnesota.

"One of the most striking things in the survey is that renters are telling us that there clearly is a market for smoke-free rental housing," said Brittany McFadden, policy director for the association. "I think a lot of landlords already knew that. We're trying to help them make it happen."

One such project is with Burncliff Apartments in Burnsville, which was destroyed because of an electrical fire just before Christmas last year. It will be nonsmoking when it is rebuilt.

### Soaring health costs

The state money is part of \$47 million in State Health Improvement Grants to local communities approved by the 2008 Legislature to tackle smoking and obesity.

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Both are major causes of chronic diseases that fuel Minnesotans' soaring health care spending, projected to rise from \$40 billion this year to \$61.5 billion by 2014.

The Association for Nonsmokers Minnesota has been working with rental properties since 2006 with help from the state Department of Health, "but this additional grant money will help us offer a lot more," McFadden said.

She said most successful efforts to make buildings smoke free start with surveys of renters.

Renters gain by avoiding second-hand smoke, she said, and landlords find that cleaning costs and fire risks drop.

McFadden said there is little research on the health effect of such efforts, because they are so new, but that previous efforts to ban smoking in public places have helped smokers quit and have helped prevent young people from taking up the habit.

The association lists about 350 Minnesota smoke-free multi-housing units on its website, but there is no official count.

The survey found that 21 percent of renters

smoke, compared with 17 percent of the overall Minnesota population. About 30 percent of renters said they experienced second-hand smoke in their living units, and most of them had tried to modify their apartments to cope.

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