Finding healthy housing in the 21st century:

Building, maintaining and supporting a comprehensive smoke-free housing database

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Background:

The Smoke-Free Housing Coalition of Maine has been working to address involuntary exposure to secondhand smoke in Maine multi-unit housing since 2003. The Coalition provides technical assistance to landlords, tenants, property management companies and public health professionals in designing and advocating for the implementation of smoke-free policies in rental residential housing. To help increase support and understanding around smoke-free housing, the Coalition has built a strong relationship with the Maine State Housing Authority, MaineHousing. The two organizations have worked together through a variety of means, since 2005, to promote the adoption of smoke-free housing policies.

As an incentive for landlords and property managers to adopt smoke-free policies and as a resource for tenants, the Smoke-Free Housing Coalition developed a free online smoke-free housing registry in December 2005. This resource, available through the Coalition's website, www.smokefreeforme.org, connected prospective tenants with smoke-free housing listings. Over five years, the smoke-free housing registry surpassed 3,700 unit listings.

In 2009, MaineHousing launched a statewide housing registry, www.MaineHousingSearch.org, through Social Serve, a national non-profit provider of housing locator services. This registry was comprehensive and widely publicized by MaineHousing. The Smoke-Free Housing Coalition saw this as an opportunity to collaborate and reach a broader audience regarding healthy housing options. Building on its strong partnership with MaineHousing, the Coalition decided to abandon the singularly-focused smoke-free registry and focus on creating an avenue for Maine tenants to find smoke-free housing on the larger, comprehensive housing registry, MaineHousingSearch.org.

Starting in October 2010, MaineHousingSearch.org adopted smoke-free housing designation options for property owners and managers listing their units on the site. Housing units located in a building with a written 100% smoke-free policy are highlighted by a smoke-free icon and prospective tenants can search for available housing based upon whether or not it is smoke-free. SocialServe.com hosts the State Housing Agency registries for 29 states and the Maine registry was the first in the nation to include a smoke-free housing option. The MaineHousingSearch.org registry and the number of smoke-free housing listings continue to grow and SocialServe.com now has the technology developed to add smoke-free housing options to other state's housing registries.

Property Owner and Manager Outreach and Education:

When the new smoke-free icon was launched in fall 2010, a variety of educational measures were taken to raise awareness amongst property owners/managers and tenants, including:

The Smoke-Free Housing Coalition conducted a postcard mailing to 16,000 landlord database announcing the merger in September 2010.

Social Serve called all landlords with units on the smoke-free housing registry to educate them about the joint registry and facilitate a transfer of their smoke-free listing. Additionally, the SocialServe.com call center contacted all property owners and managers currently listing properties to determine their smoke-free status, adjusting listings as needed.

MaineHousing and the Smoke-Free Housing Coalition of Maine held a joint webinar for property owners and managers introducing MaineHousingSearch.org and the smoke-free listing option in October 2010.

The MaineHousingSearch.org registry is highlighted on both the MaineHousing (www.MaineHousing.org) and Smoke-Free Housing Coalition of Maine (www.smokefreeforme.org) websites and can be accessed through links on those sites.

In March 2011, the Smoke-Free Housing Coalition sent an electronic announcement of the smoke-free search option on the housing registry to a statewide e-mail database of more than 100,000 Maine renters.



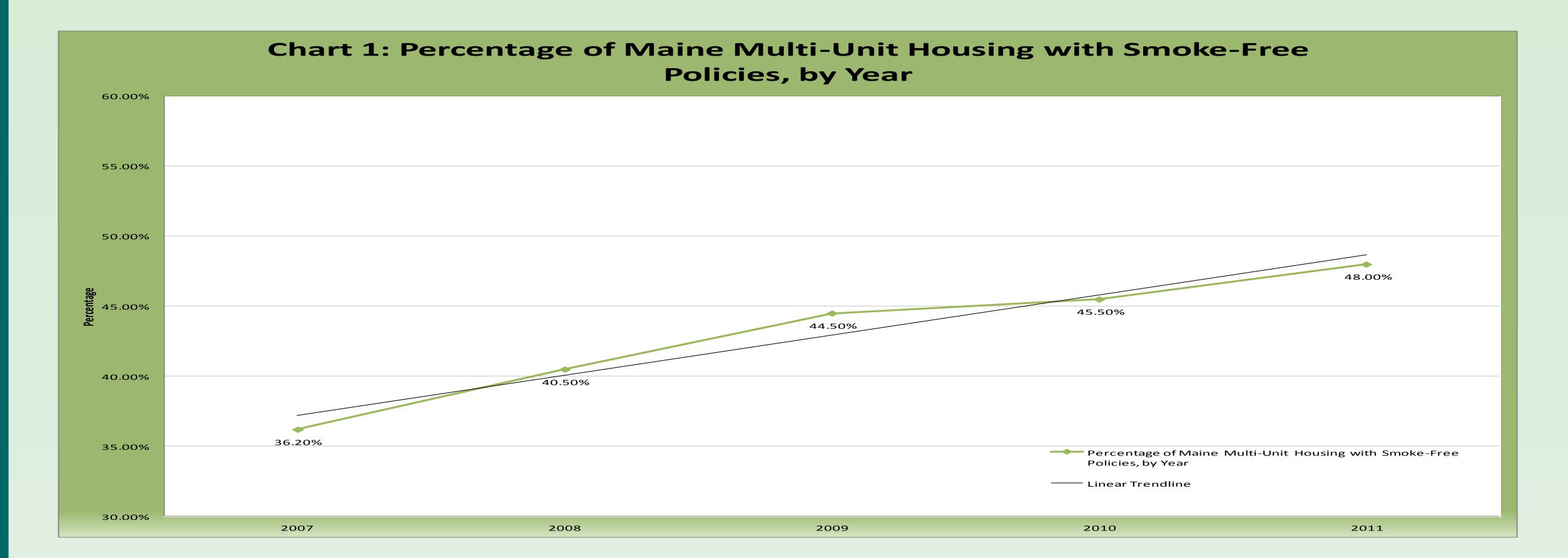


We make it easy for you to find smoke-free units all across Maine, Just visitMaineHousingSearch.org, select your city or town, and look for the smoke-free housing icon. For additional info about secondhand smoke and noke-free housing, visit www.smokefreeforme.org

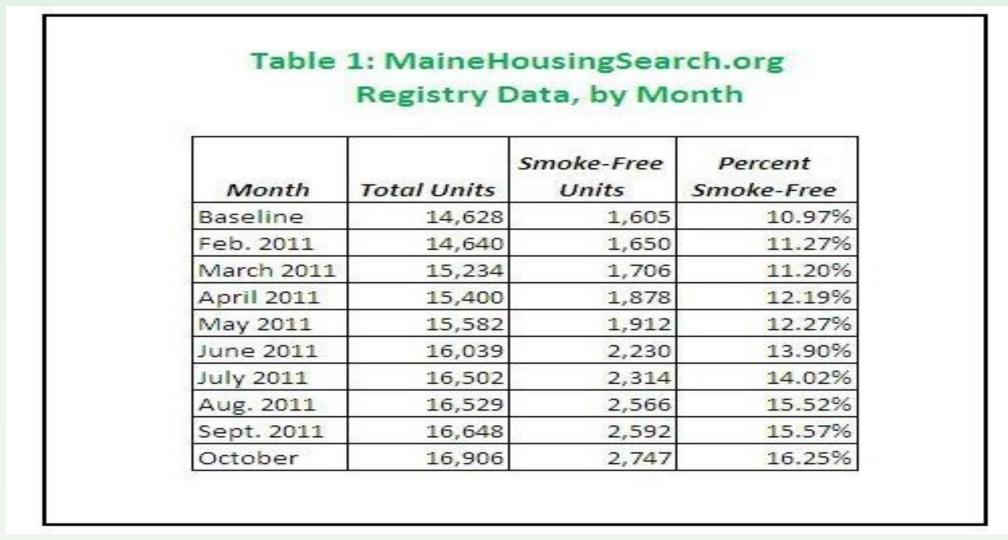
Smoke free Maine Housing Search

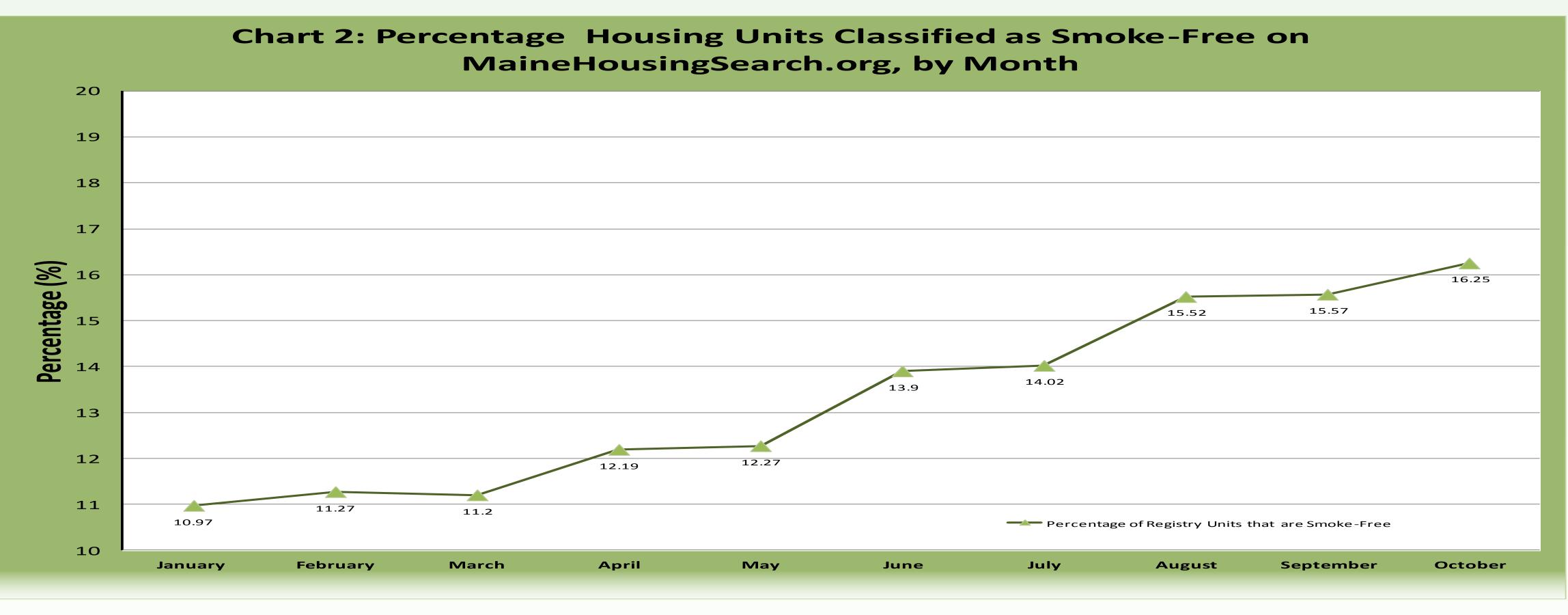
MaineHousingSearch.org Registry and Smoke-Free Designation Results:

Smoke-free housing options in Maine do not yet meet the demand. 7 out of 10 tenants would prefer to live in a smoke-free environment and while the amount of smoke-free housing continues to increase (chart 1), currently only 48% of Maine multi-unit housing is smoke-free¹.



The total number of housing units, the number of smoke-free units and the percentage of listings that are smoke-free on MaineHousingSearch.org are tracked monthly by town and county. The housing registry continues to grow, with an increase in the number of units tracked each month (table 1). Additionally, the percentage of listings that are in a 100% smoke-free building have increased each month (chart 2).





While the percentage of smoke-free listings on MaineHousingSearch.org does not correlate to the percent of the market that is smoke-free, the amount of smoke-free listings continues to increase. Since the adoption of the smoke-free listing category through October 2011, there has been a 71.15% increase in smoke-free unit listings, while there has only been a 15.57% increase of total units on the MaineHousingSearch.org registry.

¹Smoke-Free Housing Coalition of Maine Evaluation 2011

Conclusions:

Incorporating a smoke-free housing option into a statewide housing registry is an effective way to connect tenants with safe, healthy housing options.

The partnership between the Smoke-Free Housing Coalition of Maine and MaineHousing on the MaineHousingSearch.org registry is beneficial to all. The partnership improves the awareness of healthy housing options by Maine landlords and tenants by increasing the visibility of smoke-free housing. In addition, the collaboration has increased the share of smoke-free units on MaineHousingSearch.org, and eased the process of advertising smoke-free listings and increased marketability of such listings for landlords previously registered with the Smoke-Free Housing Coalition's registry. The collaboration has demonstrated the Coalition's strong support for MaineHousing's initiative and increased outreach and promotional opportunities for MaineHousing by utilizing the resources of the Smoke-Free Housing Coalition of Maine. In turn, the partnership shows strong support by MaineHousing for the smoke-free housing movement, a critical element to the success of the smoke-free housing outreach efforts among target populations — landlords and tenants.

Recommendations:

Healthy housing advocates should partner with State Housing Authorities to create smoke-free housing listing options on statewide rental housing locator services to increase awareness, availability and accessibility of smoke-free multi-unit housing.

Acknowledgements:

The Smoke-Free Housing Coalition of Maine is a non-profit organization supported by a federal grant from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention that funds the Partnership For A Tobacco-Free Maine, the Maine CDC's tobacco prevention and control program. The Coalition is comprised of over 50 public health advocates, tenants, landlords, property managers, legal professionals, environmental health professionals and many others working since 2003 to protect Maine residents in multi-unit housing from involuntary exposure to secondhand smoke. The Coalition provides free technical assistance and tools for adopting, implementing and enforcing smoke-free policies in multi-unit properties throughout Maine.

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