



# Public Comments Help Pass Smokefree Multi-Unit Housing Protections

## The Success

A campaign led by Day One, an organization working to improve community health and economic justice, successfully engaged residents of Sierra Madre to build support for the passage of a policy prohibiting smoking in Multi-Unit Housing (MUH)- in the City of Sierra Madre in October 2022. Clean Air Sierra Madre, a coalition of individuals looking to create a smokefree policy, was able to organize MUH residents concerned about secondhand smoke exposure in their homes and provide spokesperson training to prepare them to deliver testimonials and speak on the issue at city council meetings. The campaign also used data to underscore the need for the policy and show broad support.

## Background

Sierra Madre is a small city with nearly 11,000 population located in Los Angeles County situated among the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains. Day One's first attempt on a MUH campaign in Sierra Madre encountered a city council more concerned about infringing on tenants' rights rather than on protecting them from the dangers of second-hand smoke. Despite nearly four years of work on the issue, the group failed to garner enough support from the council, and the campaign ground to a halt. In 2019, with a new council that appeared more receptive to the issue, Day One decided to try again.

## The Approach

### Recruiting MUH Residents

When it came to recruitment of coalition members, Day One did not have to start from scratch. Having maintained contact with passionate coalition members from a previous campaign, they had a group of residents that were ready and willing to join the effort once again, and help recruit and engage additional residents to join the Coalition.



*Front and Back of Day One Door Hanger*

In spring of 2021, Day One began a doorhanger campaign to recruit residents from apartment and condominium complexes to join its Coalition and to become champions for the proposed policy. Over the course of three (3) days, 300-400 door hangers were distributed to all apartment and condominium complexes in Sierra Madre, and soon, concerned residents started reaching out to the organization. "We didn't get a ton of response, but those that did reach out, became really engaged," said Alisha Lopez, Tobacco Prevention Director at Day One. "There were people who were experiencing second-hand smoke in their homes, and some became really fired up."

### Training in Speaking, Writing to City Council

Day One provided two trainings to the group of residents interested SFMUH. The spokesperson trainings taught residents about how they can speak at council meetings and/or submit email comments to city council members on why the issue is important to them.

This time, the message about the need for protections for MUH residents resonated with the council, because the calls for change came from constituents who shared personal stories about the impacts of second-hand smoke that wafted into their units through the walls and closed doors. "You can have someone from an organization come and speak to a council and that holds weight, but actual residents put a face to the issue," Lopez said. "They can share their story and that pulls on the emotional heartstrings. Residents speaking to councils is just much more effective."

### Tabling/Having Presence in the Community

In addition to door hangers, Day One focused on having a presence at community events. At first, their requests to participate in community events were ignored by city officials. After the group joined forces with the YMCA, a well-respected community organization, Day One was given an opportunity to table at local community events, including those held for Fourth of July and Halloween. This community "facetime" helped the organization to educate residents about the dangers of second-hand smoke and survey MUH residents.

**IS SECONDHAND SMOKE BOTHERING YOU AT HOME?**

**CLEAN AIR SIERRA MADRE**  
#CLEAN SIERRAMADRE

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IS A COALITION OF RESIDENTS AND RENTERS WHO BELIEVE IN HAVING THE RIGHT TO BREATHE CLEAN AIR!

**HELP PROTECT SIERRA MADRE RESIDENTS AND RENTERS FROM HARMFUL SECONDHAND SMOKE AT HOME!**

**Next Meeting:**  
July 28, 2021 @ 6pm-7pm via Zoom.  
Link: [bit.ly/cleanairism](https://bit.ly/cleanairism)

For more information please contact at:  
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(213) 379-9328

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### Survey/Data Collection

Between March 2019 and February 2020, the campaign surveyed 475 Sierra Madre residents resulting in compelling data that was integrated into talking points for public comments and letters to the City Council. This data was very compelling. One of the key findings showed that 30 percent of MUH residents said they had experienced second-hand smoke drifting into their units in the past year. Most importantly, when asked their opinion about the proposed smoke-free MUH policy, 99 percent of the MUH residents said they supported such a policy.

▶ Check out the Center's Resources at [OrganizingToEndTobacco.org](https://www.organizingtoendtobacco.org):

"How to Give Public Comment at City Council Meeting"

"How to Use Stories to Win Your Campaign"

"Spokesperson Training Guide"

### Key Takeaways

**Find and Prepare Compelling Ambassadors:** It's fine to send an organization representative to speak to the city council but residents who live, work, and pay taxes in the community, are more effective messengers because they are harder for a council to ignore.



**Persistence is Key:** Initially, Day One encountered resistance from decision-makers who seemed more concerned about infringing on MUH resident's rights rather than protecting them from secondhand smoke exposure they experienced in their units. But when the makeup of the council changed, the group saw an opening to reengage the MUH campaign.

### Summary

Day One's funding for working on smoke-free MUH ended in 2021, before the policy was formally adopted. But Lopez, the Day One's Tobacco Prevention Director, kept in touch with city officials, continuing to provide technical assistance until the policy was adopted and implemented. "Don't drop the ball because the funding ended, but find a way to get it done," says Alisha Lopez. "Find a way to see the campaign through."

For information, go to  
[GoDayOne.org](https://GoDayOne.org)



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