

Non-Smokers' Rights Association Smoking and Health Action Foundation

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MARTEK: THRIVING ON CHANGE

Martek is a real estate and property management company based in St. John's, Newfoundland. With thirty years of experience in the business and a cadre of clients representing all sectors of the real estate market, Martek has built a solid reputation based on hard work and creativity. Today the company boasts a diverse portfolio and manages condominium, rental apartment as well as commercial properties.

In 2010 a human rights complaint was filed against one of Martek's clients—a condominium corporation that was unable to effectively deal with a tenant's involuntary exposure to second-hand smoke in her rented home. The smoke was originating from an occupant in the bottom unit of a stacked 3 unit townhouse. Recognizing the challenge involved in trying to contain smoke to a single unit, as well as the seriousness of exposure, Martek advised the condominium's board of directors to consider a no-smoking policy for the building.

Very aware of the financial and health benefits, and recognizing the marketability of smoke-free properties, Martek proposed a no-smoking rule that same year to the board of directors of another condominium it manages. Known as Village Park in midtown St. John's, the condominium consists of two 54-unit buildings. At the time, approximately 40-50 of the units were owner-occupied and the rest were rented. The proposal was put to a vote of the owners and it passed easily.

It was decided to implement the rule as a 2-step process—first prohibiting smoking within the private units and after one year extending to include the balconies. All owners and tenants were given 3-4 months' notice of the rule, and many of the tenants were given the opportunity to break their leases without penalty if they did not

wish to stay. Although some tenants chose to move, most stayed. Village Park's no-smoking rule is complaint-driven, and 8 months after it came into effect there have been no complaints at all.

In fact, so convinced is Martek of the way of the future that it has recommended a no-smoking policy to every condominium board of directors it has met with in the past 6 months. The company recognizes that short of having a condominium designated as non-smoking from the outset, a good time to bring in a rule is when the reigns are turned over from the developer to the newly elected board.

Martek has also chosen to make some of its commercial properties smoke-free—above and beyond the provisions of the provincial smoke-free law. The company has also chosen to remove outdoor ashtrays on its commercial properties, realizing that they were serving more as congregation points for smokers than simply a place to extinguish a cigarette. The company reports that although there are definitely butts that need to be cleaned up, this is preferable to the front of their buildings resembling outdoor designated smoking areas.

The company's website advertises "*...effervescent approaches as the market changes, and change it always does. As a diversified real estate creature, we simply thrive on change!!!*" Its response to the increasing demand for smoke-free accommodations is a perfect example of Martek's willingness to embrace change.

For more information about Martek, visit their website at www.martek.ca or call 709.754.1090.