

Breathing Easy: Public Health Policy's Role in Eliminating Tobacco Smoke Exposure

Araceli Curiel

Department of Sociology, California Lutheran University, Thousand Oaks, CA



INTRODUCTION

The vapors emitted from tobacco products are dangerous long after a smoker leaves the area, as second and third hand smoke carries carcinogens and heavy metals through the air that are easily absorbed by surrounding walls, floors, and carpets¹. This results in residents of densely-packed multi-unit housing complexes becoming a vulnerable population. Big Tobacco lobbies actively target low-income communities with high populations of racial minorities when marketing and distributing their products, which has proven to be the primary demographic of residents of apartments and condos. To combat the growing risks to community health, measures were taken by Ventura County officials to implement ordinances that will prohibit the use of tobacco products inside of every unit within housing complexes throughout the county with the goal of alleviating the devastating health impacts caused by the inhalation of smoke from cigarettes and vapes, as well as protecting susceptible populations that are directly and disproportionately put at risk as a result. The purpose of this presentation is to educate and inform in regard to the health implications of second and third hand smoke in addition to public health's role in protecting communities through the exhibition of accurate and recent ordinance implementation within Ventura County.

INTERNSHIP DESCRIPTION

Ventura County Public Health

Over the course of four months, the Ventura County Public Health- Tobacco Education and Prevention program provided the opportunity for select interns to take part in community health promotion initiatives. Daily tasks included, but were not limited to, preparing and organizing materials for cessation training sessions, social media management, policy reviews, and interviewing of key informants that hold government positions in regard to their position and outlook on the implementation smoke-free policies. The agency's highest priority was ensuring the adoption of an ordinance that would prohibit smoking and the use of any tobacco products inside 100% of public multi-unit housing complexes, such as apartments and condominium units, specifically in the cities of Oxnard and Fillmore. Although VCPH cannot directly take part in advocacy initiatives, the agency provided educational resources and cultivated relationships with community leaders to work towards safeguarding the health of Ventura County communities.

METHODOLOGY

Key Informant Interviews

The pre-policy adaptation process relies on input from community members and local officials with influence over ordinances who are categorized as "key informants". In order to assess the sociopolitical attitudes surrounding the smoke-free residential ordinance in progress, it was crucial to interview these key informants to gain perspective. Interviewees were asked about their knowledge of second and third hand smoke, their position on the need to prevent multi-unit housing residents from smoke exposure, their likeliness to support the ordinance, any foreseeable barriers to the ordinance's adoption, as well as their perspective on the most effective trajectory for the ordinance.

Educational Resources

In addition to materials concerning the devastating health impacts of toxic smoke inhalation, Ventura County Public Health provides educational materials that detail Big Tobacco's tactics, specifically their methods of targeting densely populated, low income communities that are comprised of ethnic and cultural minorities. This is done for the purpose of providing the community with the knowledge and support needed to protect and advocate for their own community rather than continuously being told what they should support.

Policy Analysis

Previous ordinances concerning limiting tobacco smoke exposure already adopted by Ventura County were analyzed in relation to office-holding supporters, office-holding opponents, and overall clarity in order to ensure the effectiveness of the ordinance in process.

KEY FINDINGS

- The most prominent opposition to the ordinance is derived from the ideology that smoking is a right rather than a privilege and is most common when people lack concise and accurate information on the consequences involved.
- More affluent communities, such as Moorpark and Ojai, had already implemented ordinances to protect their residents from second and third hand smoke, but the retail environment of the areas was a far more influencing factor than the income levels of residents.
- The majority of key informants supported the ordinance in progress and emphasized the importance of building partnerships with local organizations and promotion of educational materials as the most effective methods of ensuring the ordinance is well-received and ultimately passed.
- Public health policy and medicinal research need to not only intersect but mutually lay foundations for each other in order to keep communities as healthy as possible.

FUTURE WORK

In the future, it is ideal that *all* cities within Ventura County will adopt and maintain policies that limit community members' exposure to toxic smoke particles left behind from tobacco products. Additionally, further research must be conducted in regard to the role of public health policy in community healthcare to its full extent.

REFERENCES

1. Jia-Xun, Wu., Lau, A.T.Y., & Yan Ming, X. (2022) Indoor secondary pollutants cannot be ignored: Third-hand smoke. *Toxics*. 10(7), 363.
2. *Map of smoke-free policies in Ventura County - VCHCA*. (n.d.).

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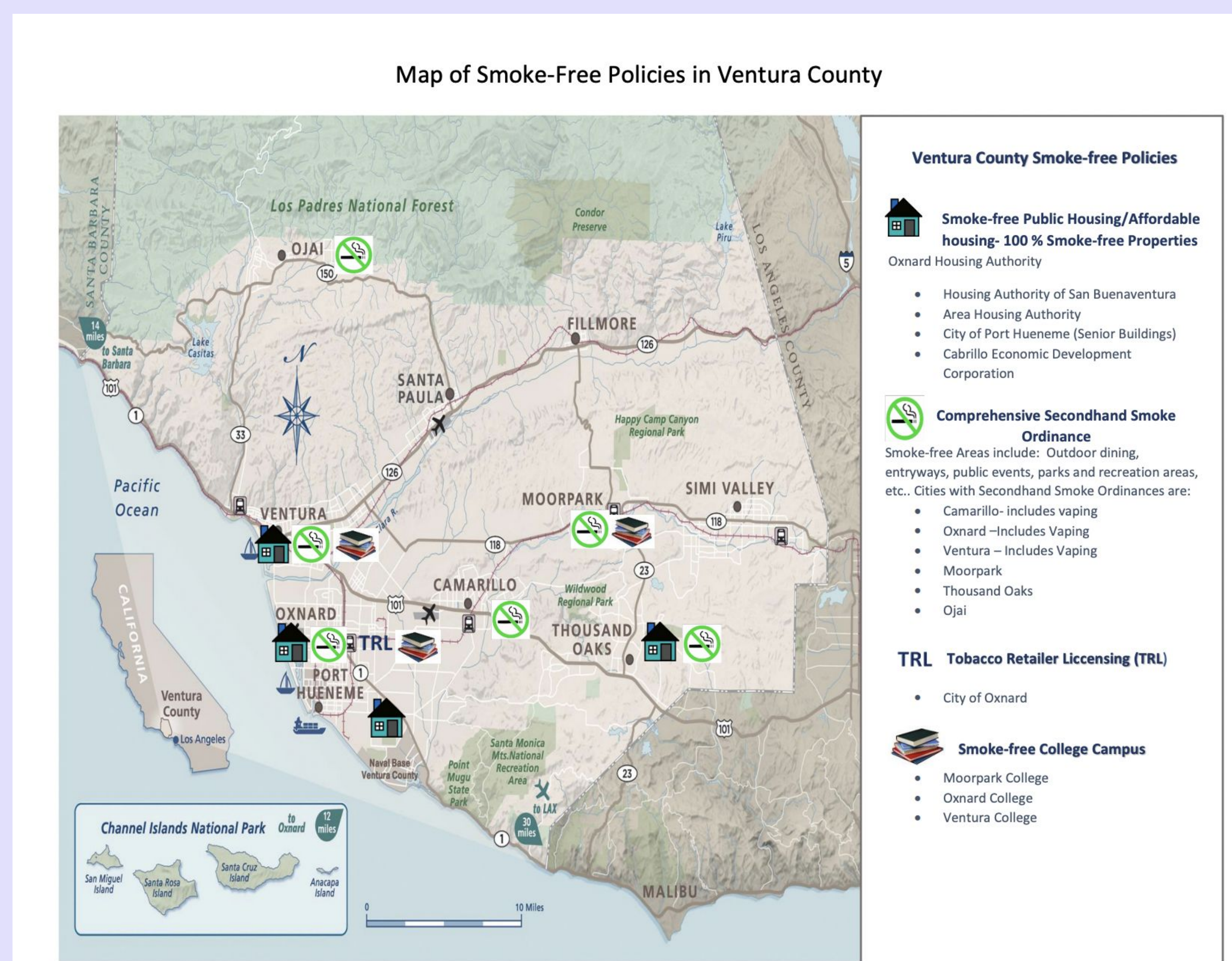


Figure 1. Map of Ventura County's anti-tobacco policies in respect to distinctive cities provided by Ventura County Public Health's website