



## Benton County Smoke-, Vape-, and Tobacco-Free Properties Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ's)

### Is this a new policy?

No. Benton County has a tobacco-free properties policy dating back to 2013. In January 2025, the Board of Commissioners approved an update to the policy which, in addition to tobacco, includes synthetic nicotine, cannabis, and smoking and vaping no matter the content of the device.

### Why are properties smoke-, vape-, and tobacco-free?

To promote the health and safety of employees and the public. Providing smoke-, vape-, and tobacco-free places protect Benton County residents from secondhand smoke, helps smokers quit and shows youth that smoking, vaping, and tobacco use is not the norm.

Tobacco use is still the leading preventable cause of death and disability in Benton County and costs our county more than \$36 million each year in medical costs and related lost productivity. The list of diseases linked to tobacco use is expanding well beyond the general health risks of coronary heart disease, stroke, cancer and chronic lung disease. Exposure to secondhand smoke is a major health risk. In fact, the Surgeon General has declared that there is no safe level of exposure.

While the health of employees and visitors is the primary focus, the policy is also essential to our ongoing responsibility to steward public resources and the environment. Smoking is estimated to be the number one cause of fire related death and injury and is a major cause of wild-land fires. The environmental impact of smoking is also significant, as cigarette filters are toxic and are the most frequently littered item.

### What is not allowed in the policy?

The policy prohibits the use of tobacco and cannabis products indoors and on outdoor property owned or occupied by Benton County, including parks, natural areas, fairgrounds, and the courthouse. This also includes doorways, front porches or outdoor foyers, and parking lots. In addition to cigarettes and cigars, the policy prohibits use of electronic cigarettes, vapes, synthetic nicotine, cannabis, and smokeless tobacco products including dip, chew, snuff, and snus.

### Who does the policy apply to?

The policy applies to all Benton County employees, volunteers, interns, clients, visitors, and vendors while on property owned or occupied by Benton County.

## Why are parks, natural areas, and the fairgrounds included in the policy?

We already have invested significantly in our parks, natural areas, and the fairgrounds. By updating the policy for smoke-, vape-, and tobacco-free spaces, we will protect that investment and promote the health of our community and environment.

### Health

Providing smoke-, vape-, and tobacco-free places for outdoor recreation and enjoyment protects Benton County residents from secondhand smoke (tobacco and cannabis), helps smokers quit and shows youth that tobacco use is not the norm.

### Environment

These policies promote cleaner, safer and more beautiful environments now and for generations to come. Cigarette butts are the most common source of litter, take decades to decompose and release toxins into the water supply. Tobacco litter is also commonly ingested by young children, wildlife and pets.

### Cost

This policy will save us money by reducing maintenance costs, lowering the risk of fire and reducing the health impact of tobacco use – which costs our county more than \$36 million each year.

## Why are nicotine pouches and smokeless tobacco not allowed?

Benton County seeks to provide a safe and nurturing environment where families and individuals can thrive. While the use of smokeless tobacco and nicotine pouch products does not affect non-users in the same way secondhand smoke does, products like these are also addictive and pose serious health risks to those who use them. Smokeless tobacco contains 28 cancer-causing agents, and users have an increased risk of developing mouth cancer or other oral health problems, including lesions and recession of the gums.

Additionally, smokeless tobacco litter impacts the appearance and maintenance of public property and can endanger the health of children, wildlife and pets. Because of this, the policy covers all tobacco products.

## Why are electronic cigarettes and vaping devices not allowed?

Electronic cigarettes (e-cigarettes) are battery-operated devices designed to look like and be used in the same manner as conventional cigarettes. E-cigarettes use cartridges to deliver vaporized nicotine or cannabis through a solution and release a vapor that looks like smoke. This poses an enforcement challenge of the policy. In addition, the safety and potential dangers associated with e-cigarettes have not yet been determined. Because of this, e-cigarettes have been included in the policy.

In 2024 e-cigarettes were the most used nicotine product among middle and high school students. Around 6% of students currently use e-cigarettes in the U.S. Additionally, there is no acceptable level of nicotine for youth. E-cigarettes as a delivery system for nicotine, can cause addiction and harm to the

developing brain. You can access more information about this report here:

<https://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/e-cigarettes/youth.html>

### **Why is cannabis included in this policy?**

Cannabis is legal for purchase and use by adults 21 years and older **at home, or on private property**. It is not allowed in public places – this includes Benton County properties. Cannabis can be used in many forms, including smoking and vaping. For this reason, it is included in the updated policy.

<https://whatslegaloregon.com/>

### **Isn't it a person's right to use tobacco?**

Tobacco and nicotine are legal products for purchase and use by adults 21 years and older. Employees, clients, and visitors who choose to vape or use tobacco may continue to do so. We politely ask them not to vape or use tobacco on Benton County property.

### **How will people know that smoking, vaping, and tobacco use is not allowed on property owned or occupied by Benton County?**

Benton County has adopted a proactive approach to updating this policy. New signage will clearly indicate that smoking, vaping, and tobacco use are not allowed on the grounds or in the buildings. Printed and web-based materials containing information about the policy are also available. Additionally, Benton County employees who work directly with the public have received information and training on educating visitors about the policy.

### **What if I see someone using tobacco on Benton County property?**

Eighty seven percent of adults in Benton County do not smoke. Most people who smoke look for “Smoke-, vape, and tobacco-free” signs and will comply with the policy if they are aware of it – even in areas with limited or no staff presence.

If you see a person smoking, vaping, or using tobacco on Benton County property, assume that they are not aware of the policy. After the policy is explained, most individuals will be happy to comply. If you approach someone, please remember to be polite and friendly. The primary purpose of this policy is to promote health and provide help to quit tobacco.

### **Where can I go to use tobacco while I'm on Benton County property?**

If you plan to use tobacco products, please do so at a location that is not on Benton County property. We encourage you to be respectful of the environment and our neighbors by taking your trash to a receptacle and keeping sidewalks and walkways open.

If you need any clarification on property boundaries, please consult the Benton County Tobacco Prevention & Education Coordinator: [bentonhealthycommunities@bentoncountyor.gov](mailto:bentonhealthycommunities@bentoncountyor.gov)

### **Are there designated smoking areas?**

There are no designated smoking areas on Benton County properties. Providing a place to use tobacco does not support our goal to create a healthier environment for our employees, volunteers, interns, clients, visitors and vendors. We are also working to support those who wish to quit tobacco products by preventing any “triggers” like smoking areas that make quitting difficult.

If you plan to use tobacco products, please do so at a location that is not on Benton County property and always dispose of waste in the proper receptacles.

### **Can I smoke or vape in my car on the property?**

No. Benton County expects that all employees, volunteers, interns, clients, visitors and vendors do not use tobacco products in any location, both indoors and outdoors, including parking lots, at all times, while they are on Benton County property.

### **How can I control my nicotine cravings while on Benton County property?**

Please come prepared with your own nicotine replacement therapies to help manage your cravings while on Benton County property. These products include the nicotine patch, gum, lozenge, inhaler and nasal spray as well as several prescription medications. The use of electronic cigarettes is not allowed on Benton County property.

Other than nicotine replacement therapy, there are techniques you can use to help cope with your cravings while on Benton County property. When a craving hits, it is helpful to find a mental distraction until the feeling passes. Going for a walk, drinking water or having a healthy snack can help with cravings.

If you are ready to quit tobacco or nicotine or would like to talk with someone about how to manage your cravings while in a tobacco-free environment, contact the [Oregon Tobacco Quit Line](#) at 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669) or in Spanish at 1-877-DEJELO-YA (1-877-266-3863). You may be eligible for free nicotine patches or gum.

### **How will this policy be enforced?**

All members of the Benton County community are responsible for adherence to the smoke-, vape-, and tobacco-free property policy. County employees will assist in maintaining a smoke-, vape-, and tobacco-free environment by helping to inform and remind volunteers, interns, clients, visitors and vendors that tobacco use is not allowed on Benton County property.

### Are there resources to help me quit smoking or using tobacco?

Offering resources to quit tobacco for employees and visitors is an integral component of a tobacco-free policy.

If you are an employee or dependent covered by Benton County health benefits, you can find out more information about tobacco cessation benefits by going to the Human Resources Employee Wellness page on *'The BEE'*.

If you are a client or visitor, you can receive free help to quit tobacco from the Oregon Tobacco Quit Line at 1-800-QUIT-NOW (1-800-784-8669) or in Spanish at 1-855-DEJELLO-YA (1-877-266-3863). You may be eligible for free nicotine patches or gum.

### Who can I contact if I have concerns or questions?

If you have questions, please contact the Benton County Tobacco Prevention & Education Coordinator:  
[bentonhealthycommunities@bentoncountyor.gov](mailto:bentonhealthycommunities@bentoncountyor.gov)