Campus-related fire fatalities from January 2000 to March 2014

85 fatal fires have been documented that occurred on a college campus, in Greek housing or in off-campus housing within 3-miles of the campus – claiming a total of 122 victims.

- 72 fires have occurred in off-campus housing claiming 101 victims
- 7 fires have occurred in on-campus building or residence halls claiming 9 victims
- 6 fires have occurred in Greek housing claiming 10 victims

Of the 83 fires documented:
- 14 were intentionally set claiming 22 victims
- 38 were accidental – includes cooking, candles, smoking or electrical claiming 52 victims
- 33 of the fires the cause was never determined – or the cause was not available at press time. These fires claimed 49 victims.

Source: The Center for Campus Fire Safety

Good questions to ask before moving in or signing a lease

1. Are working smoke alarms installed? (Preferably in each bedroom, interconnected to sound all if any one detects smoke)
2. Are there at least two ways to exit your bedroom and your building?
3. Do the upper floors of the building have at least two interior stairs, or a fire escape?
4. Is a sprinkler system installed and maintained?
5. Are the existing electrical outlets adequate for all of the appliances, computers, printers and electronics that you are bringing – without the need for extension cords?
6. Are there EXIT signs in the building hallways to indicate accessible escape routes?
7. Does the building have a fire alarm system installed and maintained?
8. Has the building's heating system been inspected recently (in the last year)?
9. Is the building address clearly posted to allow emergency services to find you quickly in the event of an emergency?
10. Does the sprinkler system or fire alarm system send a signal to the local fire department and/or campus security?

On-campus fire safety

In cases where fire fatalities have occurred on college campuses, alcohol was a factor. There is a strong link between alcohol and fire deaths. Alcohol abuse often impairs judgment and hampers evacuation efforts.

Many other factors contribute to the problem of dormitory housing fires including:

- Improper use of 911 notification systems delays emergency response.
- Student apathy is prevalent. Many are unaware that fire is a risk or threat in the environment.
- Evacuation efforts are hindered since fire alarms are often ignored.
- Building evacuations are delayed due to lack of preparation and preplanning.
- Vandalized and improperly maintained smoke alarms and fire alarm systems inhibit early detection of fires.
- Misuse of cooking appliances, overloaded electrical circuits, and extension cords increase the risk of fires.

Safety precautions for colleges and universities

- Provide students with a program for fire safety and prevention.
- Teach students how to properly notify the fire department using the 911 system.
- Install smoke alarms and an automatic fire sprinkler system in every dormitory room and every level of housing facilities.
- Maintain and regularly test smoke alarms and fire alarm systems. Replace smoke alarm batteries every semester.
- Regularly inspect rooms and buildings for fire hazards. Ask your local fire department for assistance.
- Inspect exit doors and windows and make sure they are working properly.
- Create and update detailed floor plans of buildings, and make them available to emergency personnel, resident advisors and students.
- Conduct fire drills and practice escape routes and evacuation plans. Urge students to take each alarm seriously.
- Make sure electrical outlets and power strips are not overloaded and extension cords are used properly.
- Learn to properly use and maintain heating and cooking appliances.

Related publications

- Campus Fire Safety
- Fire Safe Student Housing A Guide for Campus Housing Administrators
- Topical Fire Report Series: University Housing Fires (PDF, 788 Kb)
- Bonfire Collapse, Texas A&M University, College Station, TX November 1999 (PDF, 1.9 Mb)

Links of interest

- Michael H. Minger Foundation: Fire Safety for Students with Disabilities
- Campus Firewatch
- Center for Campus Fire Safety
- CampusFireSafety.com

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http://www.usfa.fema.gov/citizens/college/