

U.S. Fire  
Administration

FEMA

## Campus fire safety: safety tips for students and parents

This page contains links to non-U.S. government websites. [What this means to you >](#)

Each year college and university students, on- and off-campus, experience hundreds of fire-related emergencies nationwide. There are several specific causes for fires on college campuses, including cooking, intentionally set fires, overloaded power strips and open flame. Overall, most college-related fires are due to a general lack of knowledge about fire safety and prevention.

For most students, the last fire safety training they received was in grade school, but with new independence comes new responsibilities. It is important that both off-campus and on-campus students understand fire risks and know the preventative measures that could save their lives.



[Additional Video Formats, Transcript >](#)

### Safety tips for students

#### Candles

- Make sure candles are in sturdy holders and put out after each use.
- Never leave a burning candle unattended.
- Keep candles away from draperies and linens.
- Use flameless candles which are both safe and attractive.
- [Learn About Candle Safety >](#)

#### Cooking

- Cook only where it is permitted.
- Keep your cooking area clean and uncluttered.
- Never leave cooking unattended.
- If a fire starts in a microwave, keep the door closed and unplug the unit.
- [Learn About Cooking Fire Safety >](#)

#### Smoking

- Make sure cigarettes and ashes are out. Never toss hot cigarette butts or ashes in the trash can.
- Use deep, wide ashtrays. Place ashtrays on something sturdy and hard to ignite.
- After a party, check for cigarette butts, especially under cushions. Chairs and sofas catch on fire fast and burn fast.
- It is risky to smoke when you have been drinking or are drowsy.
- [Learn About Smoking Safety >](#)

#### Escape planning

- Get low and go under the smoke to escape to your safe exit.
- Feel the door. If it's hot, use your second way out.
- Use the stairs; never use an elevator during a fire.
- Practice your escape plan. Always have two ways out.
- [Learn About Escape Planning >](#)

### Off-campus fire safety

According to the U.S. Department of Education, there are approximately 18,000,000 students enrolled in 4,100 colleges and universities across the country. Since the 2000 academic year, 86% of the campus-related fire fatalities have occurred in off-campus housing where approximately two-thirds of students live.

There are five common factors in a number of these fires:

- Lack of automatic fire sprinklers
- Missing or disabled smoke alarms
- Careless disposal of smoking materials

#### 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



[Campus fire safety poster for student living areas](#) (PDF, 851 Kb)

#### 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?

- Impaired judgment from alcohol consumption
- Upholstered furniture fires on decks and porches

Source: Campus-Firewatch

### 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.

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 buildings 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?

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### 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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