

WASHINGTON DC FIRE & EMS DEPARTMENT  
OFFICE OF THE FIRE MARSHAL

**Informational Bulletin #2008-3**

**Dennis L. Rubin, Fire Chief**

**Gary L. Palmer, Fire Marshal**



## Safety on Campus and Off Campus

### September is Campus Fire Safety Month

In 2002-2005, U.S. fire departments responded to an estimated average of 3,300 structure fires in dormitories, fraternities, sororities, and barracks. These fires caused an annual average of 7 civilian deaths, 46 civilian fire injuries, and \$25 million in direct property damage. Note: Dormitories include school, college and university dormitories; fraternity and sorority houses; monasteries; bunk houses; barracks; and nurses' quarters.

**On-Campus living.** Residence halls and Greek housing check with your resident assistant (RA) or housing office to see what type of fire safety measures are in place, review the escape plan and **practice it**. Know the following:

- Closest emergency exit- Count the number of doors on your floor to the closest emergency exit. If you were crawling on the ground how many doors until you get to the exit door. The reality is you will not be able to stand up in the event of a fire.
- Smoke alarm- Does your room have a working hard wired smoke alarm with battery back up. Go ahead try it out by depressing the button, **make sure it works!**
- If your school uses fossil burning fuels do you have a carbon monoxide detector, if not request one or buy it.
- No Smoking that includes trying to **sneak one** by a window or in your room. Fires from smoking related products are a cause of many fires.
- Reduce the number of posters and papers on your wall, items such as this increase vertical fire spread rapidly.
- Minimize extension cords if they are allowed use power strips and extension cords with UL approval only. No hiding extension cords under rugs.
- Practice fire drills, yes they do interrupt your sleep but they may save your life in the event of an emergency.

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**Off-Campus living.** Apartments and houses all must comply with applicable fire codes. The Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs is responsible for the issuance of a business license and occupancy permit for rental housing. **Make sure your residence is a licensed dwelling.** A licensed dwelling is inspected to insure compliance with codes. Know the following:

- Make sure there are working smoke alarms in all sleeping areas and hallways, stairwells etc. Test the alarm to make sure it is working. If the dwelling does not have a smoke alarm, contact the Office of the Fire Marshal at 202-727-1600 to report no smoke alarm or any fire code violation.
- Know two ways out of every room. Make sure all windows will open. If bars are installed on the windows they must be releasable or removable from the inside without the use of a key, tool or force greater than that which is required for normal operation of the window.
- Have and practice an escape plan make sure all occupants understand. Have a common meeting point outside the dwelling. **Don't reenter the building once you have left.**
- If the dwelling utilizes fossil burning fuels a carbon monoxide should be installed to detect any carbon monoxide leaks.
- Keep candles away from flammable items and never leave one burning unattended.
- Don't overload extension cords, only used UL approved extension cords and power strips. **Don't daisy chain multiple power strips.**
- Keep a UL-listed multipurpose fire extinguisher in the home, if an apartment an extinguisher should be mounted in a cabinet or mounted on the wall in the hallway. Make sure extinguisher is in date and fully charged.
- If you use a space heater make sure it is UL approved and is not operating too close to combustible items including bedding and clothing. Kerosene heaters are illegal to use in the District of Columbia.
- If you do smoke make sure all cigarettes are placed into ashtrays. Before dumping ashtrays, pour small amount of water to cover all smoking materials.
- If your dwelling has a fireplace make sure all ashes are cleaned and place in approved containers. Never put ashes in paper bags or dispose of close to dwellings.

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