



**State of West Virginia
Department of Military Affairs and Public Safety**

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For immediate release

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September is "National Campus Fire Safety Month"

The Center for Campus Fire Safety has designated September as "National Campus Fire Safety Month" with the goal of raising national awareness about the importance of protecting our young adults. In West Virginia from January 2000 through December 2008, there were 96 reported fires with 1 fire death and over half a million dollars in total estimated property loss due to fire occurring in college housing such as dorms, fraternities, sororities and barracks.

"As college students are preparing to head to school this month, they really do need to keep in mind how important fire safety is to their survival—because fires kill no matter what your age," said West Virginia State Fire Marshal Sterling Lewis, Jr. "Parents owe it to their children to look for housing protected by residential fire sprinklers as well as smoke alarms. Having both reduces their children's chances of dying in a fire by 82%." *The U.S. Fire Administration offers the following information:*



THE FACTS

- 5 is the average number of students who die each year, mostly in off-campus fires.
- 3,800 [estimated] university housing fires occur each year in the US.
- 83% of university housing fires are cooking fires.
- 23% of university housing fires happen in September and October, the peak period.



COLLEGE FIRE RISKS

- Four common factors in deadly campus fires are: lack of fire sprinkler systems; missing or disabled smoke alarms; careless disposal of smoking materials and impaired judgment from alcohol use.
- *Student apathy is prevalent.* Many are unaware that fire is an actual risk or threat.
- Misuse and carelessness with smoking materials and candles are the leading causes of civilian campus deaths.



How to reduce and prevent loss of life and property in on- and off-campus housing:

- *Never disable a smoke alarm* or any other fire protection equipment. This is not only a crime, it endangers everyone in the building and responding firefighters.

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WHEN YOU MOVE IN:

- Make sure the smoke alarms are in place and working. If not, call your landlord to have them installed (***this is the LAW in West Virginia!***).
- Keep tall furniture and decorations away from all automatic fire sprinkler heads.
- Never hang anything from fire sprinklers.
- Keep windows and door clear of furniture for quick exiting.
- Never prop stairway doors open. Keep hallways clear.
- Identify all emergency exits on your floor. Remember not to use elevators if there’s a fire.
- Never overload electrical outlets. Don’t staple, tape or nail extension cords or run them under carpeting.

DURING THE SCHOOL YEAR:

- Never leave candles unattended and keep them away from drapes, bedding, etc.
- Cook only where permitted and never leave cooking unattended.
- If fire starts in a microwave, keep the door closed and unplug the unit.
- Never smoke in bed. If you must smoke, do so outside the building.
- Never smoke when you’ve been drinking or are drowsy.
- After a party, check furniture and cushions for smoldering cigarette butts.

ESCAPE PLANNING:

- If you have a disability, alert others of the type of help you need to leave the building.
- Use the stairs; never use an elevator during a fire.
- If you have to escape through smoke, get low and go under the smoke to your exit.
- Feel the door first before opening. If it’s hot, use your second way out.
- If you’re trapped, call the fire department and tell them where you are. Seal your doors with rags and signal from your window.

NOTE: The Center for Campus Fire Safety is a non-profit organization devoted to reducing fires at campuses across the nation through education advocacy. A collection of free resources for campus fire safety professionals to use are available at the Center’s website, including lesson plans, presentations and more. Visit the Center’s website at www.campusfiresafety.org to learn more.

Additional information is also available through Campus Firewatch (www.campus-firewatch.com) and the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) at www.nfpa.org.

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