



OFF-CAMPUS

By Tim Knisely

March 2019

Spring is Near!

After the cold winter (depending where you live), the long awaited spring season is a welcomed change. Chances to get outside, spring sports, spring football, end of the semester and graduation. With these events brings the associated parties and spontaneous gatherings that occur, just because. Spring also brings us in to the prime season when fires are on the increase in off-campus housing. Most of the significant fires that occur in our campus communities happen during the first two months of the semester, or the last two - April and May. Why is this?

I have investigated dozens of fires in off-campus housing over the years. Many, many times while documenting the scene we would ask ourselves aloud 'how did everyone get out alive'? There are so many times that luck, fate, or whatever intervention you would believe in had occurred. It just was not their day. Or, it was not the perfect storm.

Many of these fires occur when there are many contributing factors to make the occupants vulnerable. Older housing, lack of sprinklers, inoperable or lacking smoke alarms, improperly maintained fire alarms, bad wiring, alcohol, fireworks, post party hours, candles, blocked exits, overcrowded, unfamiliar surroundings, unattended cooking, smoking, and again - alcohol.

Therefore, we need to remind our students of the hazards now as the spring season is upon us. Have a sober party host, someone to be the designated responsible person for that evening to keep everyone safe. Develop a checklist and share with the property owners or student life's off-campus office. Help them host a safe party. We are not saying to not have a good time, but drink responsibly. Look out for the person that is not doing that. Get them to a safe location to sleep or have someone get them safely home.



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Someone needs to check the smoke/co alarms before the party to make sure they work. If someone took the batteries, get new ones. If someone took the alarm, call the property owner if necessary to have these replaced. Check the fire extinguisher, or get one if there is not one.

One of the most important jobs of the host is to empty ashtrays at the end of the party, take the trash outside of the building, and do a walk through to make sure everything appears safe. Turn off lights, blow out candles and check the oven or stovetop. Was there a campfire outside? Make sure it is extinguished.

To some, this may sound silly or may seem like common sense, but it is not. If someone does this, they might just save a life. Maybe their own.

Tim

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Tim Knisely is the Senior Fire Inspector for the Centre Region Code Administration in State College, PA. In this position he manages the Existing Structures Division that administers the fire and property maintenance code in all existing commercial and residential rental properties, and coordinates the life safety education for the community including off-campus and Greek housing.

Tim served on The Center's Board of Directors since its inception and served as treasurer from 2007 to 2010.

He is a frequent presenter at Campus Fire Forum, an instructor for the FireSmart Campus program and served as project manager for Campus Fire Data.



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