

# Leaving Home

## College Fire Safety and Burn Prevention

*Burn Awareness Week - February 1-7, 2004*



American  
Burn  
Association

## Freedom!

Ah, freedom. Going to college, moving out on your own for the first time, you're an adult now. You can stay up as late as you want, sleep in as late as you want, eat whatever you want, with no one telling you what to do. But, with that freedom comes responsibility.

Your safety and the safety of others is now your responsibility. You can't depend on your campus housing administrator or your new landlord alone to make sure your living environment is safe. You need to take steps to prevent fires and burn injuries.

So, you passed the SAT, got the GPA, and may even have some college credits under your belt already. But do you know

some practical ways to prevent fires and burn injuries at home or in your dorm room? For example, your landlord may be required to provide a smoke alarm in your apartment, but who is responsible for testing the battery? And how often should the battery be changed?

Here are some reasons why it's important for you to learn about fire safety:

- There are about 1400 structure fires every year (about 3-4 fires a day) on college campuses.
- Dormitory and Greek housing fires result in about \$6 million in property

damage each year.

- Most college students die in fires that occur in off-campus housing.
- In most cases where fire fatalities occurred on campuses, alcohol was a factor.
- Fires and burn injuries are preventable.

Want to learn more?

Read on...



Do you know how often to check your smoke alarm battery?

## Can You Hear Me?

A smoke alarm is a life-saver. There is no disputing this. It sounds when there is smoke, giving you time to escape a burning structure before it's too late.

Sounds easy. But, a smoke alarm will do you

no good if it is disabled, ignored, or if you don't have an escape plan.

Never disable an alarm. The annoyance you experience may be a small price to pay if a life is saved because of it.

Never pull a smoke alarm

as a prank—people will get used to hearing it and ignore the alarm in a real fire. And, never ignore a smoke alarm.

Plot out an escape plan, with 2 potential exits from each room, and practice it.

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## Smoke Alarms:

- Check the batteries every month. Replace them if they are not working.
- Make a habit of replacing the batteries every six months.
- Don't temporarily disable your alarm—you may forget to enable it later.
- Smoke detectors should be on every floor of the building and in all the sleeping areas.

## Serving It up Hot

You don't have to be a gourmet cook to be well-versed in cooking safety. Even if the only appliance you use to prepare meals is a microwave, then you, too, need to read this article.

There are two major burn hazards associated with food preparation: fires and scald injuries. Fires often occur from improper use and upkeep of cooking appliances and materials. Scald burns occur when the hot foods or liquids spill on someone's skin.

Here are some tips for safe cooking:

- Never leave cooking food unattended.
- Be careful of steam that accumu-

lates under lids—lift the lid away from your face and arm.

- Always use pot holders when handling hot plates and pans.
- Wear short sleeves or tight-fitting sleeves when cooking.
- Don't try to carry too many hot things at once, and avoid carrying containers of food that are too heavy for you.
- Foods heat unevenly in microwaves. Stir and test food before serving or eating.
- Microwaved liquids can reach boil-

ing temperatures without the appearance of boiling. Test before drinking.

- Use non-slip area rugs in cooking areas to avoid trip hazards.



Never leave cooking food unattended.

- Keep a multipurpose fire extinguisher in the kitchen or cooking area.

## Just Sign Here . . .



Renting your first house or apartment is a new experience. Here are some things to consider before you sign a rental contract:

- Make sure there are working smoke alarms.
- Make sure there are at least 2 ways to exit your living space and building.
- Fire escapes or ladders should be available for the upper floor.

- A working sprinkler system should be installed.
- Electrical wiring should be adequate and up to code.
- Make sure the building is regularly inspected by the fire department.
- Know the owner/manager's policy for correcting safety problems.

- Doors should be rated for fire.
- Working fire extinguishers should be available.
- Identify whether there are gas or electric appliances.
- There should be a fire hydrant outside, close by the building.

## Celebrate Good Times

Cookouts, campfires, bonfires . . . all common ways to spend a vacation or to celebrate homecoming weekend. . . all common causes of burn injuries. Here's what you need to know about these activities:

- Never use gasoline to fuel a fire or start a charcoal grill.
- Never squirt lighter fluid on coals that are already hot.

- Always start a gas grill with the lid open.
- Store propane tanks and flammable liquids away from living areas.
- Clear a 3-foot area



NEVER use gasoline to fuel a fire, it can flash back on you.

of ground around any campfire or bonfire.

- Extinguish all fires with water. Do not smother with sand or dirt.
- Have a bucket of water and a multipurpose extinguisher available for emergencies.

## In the Mood

“Setting the mood” in your private space, be it a dorm room or an entire apartment, is something that you may do on a daily basis. Just be sure that creating the perfect atmosphere doesn’t turn into a tragedy such as a fire or burn injury.

Incense and candles are commonly used to set the mood. Whether you use them for aromatherapy, romantic lighting or relaxation, you need to remember to take safety precautions when using these products.

Some colleges and universities ban the use of these products in on-campus housing. If they are banned, do not use them.

Never leave a burning candle or incense

unattended.

Keep candles away from items that can easily catch fire such as curtains, clothing, paper, books, bedding or other combustible items.

Keep candle wicks trimmed to 1/4 inch in length.

Use candle holders that are sturdy, won’t tip over easily and are approved for this use.

Keep candles and incense away from flammable liquids which include perfumes, aerosol sprays and lighter fluid.

Remember that melted wax is extremely hot and can cause a scald burn.

Keep hands and exposed skin away from open flames.

Never place candles on an unstable surface where they can be easily knocked over.



Candles on this headboard could easily fall and cause a fire.

Be sure to extinguish all candles and incense before going to sleep.

## These are NOT Lego's . . .



Electricity is so important to our daily functioning, especially for college students. Computers, printers, and all the other hardware that go along with them are enough to overload any socket.

A key thing to remember when using electricity is to never overload an outlet. This is a common cause of fires. Only use power strips that have over-current protectors when adding multiple appliances to one outlet.

Extension cords should never be used as

permanent wiring. They should only be used for temporary situations, for hours and not days at a time.

Do not use staples to hold down electrical cords, and never route cords under carpets or walkways. Damage could occur to the cord and start a fire.

Never break off a grounding post on a plug in order to fit it into a non-grounded wall plug.

Use light bulbs with the wattage rec-

ommended on the fixture.

Do not use appliances that have damaged or frayed cords. Do not use outlets that are hot to the touch—report them to your RA or landlord.

Finally, turn off all electrical appliances that produce heat (irons, stoves) when you leave the room.

## Lighting Up and Getting “Lit”

Because you are out on your own, you have the freedom to engage in activities such as smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol. Why mention that here? Smoking fires are the leading cause of fire fatalities in our country, and alcohol consumption has been linked to many on-campus fire deaths.

Drinking alcohol impairs your judgment and coordination, so your ability to respond to a smoke alarm is inhibited. If

you have been drinking heavily, you are more likely to fall into a bonfire or to fall asleep smoking.

It is never a good idea to smoke in bed, even if you are sober. Extinguish all cigarettes before going to bed or



You are more likely to fall asleep smoking if you are also under the influence of alcohol.

leaving a room.

Flaming shots are also dangerous. Facial burns and airway burns have been associated with these drinks. Alcohol and open flames should never be mixed.



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### ***The following burns require immediate medical attention:***

- Burns bigger than the size of the person's palm
- Burns that wrap around an arm or leg
- Burns that involve the face, airway, hands, feet, major joints or genital area
- All chemical and electrical shocks (damage might not be immediately obvious)
- Burns occurring in an enclosed space, such as a house or car
- Burns that are white, gray, leathery or painless (these are too deep to treat at home)

## Help! I Need Somebody . . .

Now that you know how to prevent fires on and off-campus, let's talk about what you should do if there is a fire, or if you get burned.

First of all, have a plan. An escape plan that has been designed for your living space and that you have practiced ahead of time will help to avoid panic and make you more likely to get out alive.

Once you are out, you should find the closest phone and call 9-1-1 or your local emergency number. If there is a fire alarm pull in your building, you may also have pulled this before your exit if it was convenient.



Be prepared so that you can act quickly in case of a fire.

Stay outside the building once you're out—going back in to rescue a pet, possession or a person could put your life at risk. Wait for the professional firefighters to arrive and notify them of the approximate location of anyone you suspect may still be in the building.

If you or your roommate receive a burn injury, first stop the burning process. Put out the fire if necessary, remove clothing, and cool with water. Avoid using ice. Then, check the size. If the burn is larger than the size of your palm, then it is bigger than 1% of your body surface and should be treated by a medical professional. Also, if you suspect that you breathed in a lot of smoke before escaping a fire, then you should also seek medical attention because the smoke can do serious damage to your lungs.

To treat a small burn at home, keep it cleaned and covered with a bandage. Avoid applying creams, ointments or salves. Seek medical attention if it does not heal.