

Campus Fire Safety NEWS

Fatal off-campus fire in Maryland adds to a tragic toll across the nation

Almost 80 percent of student housing fire fatalities occur in off-campus occupancies.

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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BELCHERTOWN, Mass., Jan. 24, 2006— Today, a fire broke out in the basement of an off-campus apartment building in College Park, Maryland. David Ellis, 23, a senior at the University of Maryland from New York died of smoke inhalation. An off-campus fire in April 2005 claimed the life of another University of Maryland student.

This is the fourth fire fatality in student housing this academic year. On the same day in October 2005, two students died in an off-campus fire in Raleigh, North Carolina and another student was killed in an off-campus fire in Lawrence, Kansas.

Nationwide, 82 people have been killed in student housing since January 2000, as identified by the Center for Campus Fire Safety, a non-profit organization that compiles information on campus-related fires. Approximately 78 percent of the fire fatalities have occurred in off-campus occupancies such as rented houses and apartments. Common factors in a number of these fires include:

- Lack of automatic fire sprinklers
- Disabled smoke alarms
- Careless disposal of smoking materials
- Alcohol consumption

"It is vital that students learn the steps they can take to protect themselves, their friends and roommates from fire," said Ed Comeau, director of the Center for Campus Fire Safety. Some of these include:

- Choosing fire-safe housing that includes automatic fire sprinklers
- Installing smoke alarms on every level and ensure that they are working at all times.
- Knowing two ways out, no matter where you are. A residence hall, your house or apartment, a restaurant or a movie theater.
- If a smoke alarm is being activated needlessly, such as by cooking or steam from a shower, relocate the smoke alarm instead of disabling it.
- Properly disposing of smoking material by using ashtrays.
- After parties, checking the cushions on couches and chairs to make sure there aren't any lit cigarettes smoldering.
- Learning how to use a fire extinguisher BEFORE a fire breaks out.
- Properly using extension cords and electrical appliances.

"Learning these fire safety behaviors will help people during their college years and throughout their lives," said Comeau. "These are 'life skills' that might become 'life-saving skills' someday."

According to the Center, April and May, followed by August and September, have been the two most dangerous periods of time for student housing fire fatalities. For the first time since January 2000, no student fire deaths occurred during August and September in 2005. Additionally, 2005 marked the first time September has been designated as National Campus Fire Safety Month.

More information on campus fire safety can be found at the Center's website at www.campusfire.org, including a compilation of all of the fatal fires in student housing identified by the Center since January 2000 and a list of questions that parents and students can ask when looking at student housing. This information can be found in the RESOURCE section of the Center's website.

The Center for Campus Fire Safety, a leader in fire safety, is a non-profit organization that is devoted to reducing fires at campuses across the nation through education and advocacy.