

Dorm safety 101

Teach students one more lesson before they head to college

By Audrie Armes, editorial assistant

Each year, students leave the comfort and security of their family home and set up residence at college, either in a dorm or in a nearby apartment. This is a time for excitement and independence

— and a little trepidation on the parents' end. How

can you ensure they are safe when you're not there to watch over them? Before

sending your kids off to college, be sure they

know the basics of safety

when it comes to living on their own.

According to *Campus Firewatch*, a monthly electronic newsletter focusing on fire safety issues at colleges and universities, during the last three years 52 students have died in fires in college residences, and 80 percent of fire fatalities occur in off-campus homes. Careless smoking and cooking, unattended candles and overloaded extension cords and power outlets are among the most common causes of student fires.

"A lot of unnecessary deaths, injuries and property loss can be avoided by following some simple rules," said Michael G. Clendenin, executive director of the Electrical Safety Foundation International, Rosslyn, VA. "This is particularly important for new college students living on their own for the first time, in old buildings with old electrical systems."

Tips for the college bound

ESFI suggests some simple safety rules for the college bound:

- Never run power cords across traffic paths or under rugs or furniture.
- Never tack or nail an electrical cord to any surface.
- Never use extension cords on a continuous basis; they are temporary solutions only.
- Limit the energy you are demanding of the circuit when using multiple receptacle power strips and surge protectors.
- Replace halogen and floor lamps with more efficient, cooler burning fluorescent lamps. Many universities now ban halogen lamps because of the fire risk.

If tragedy does strike, be sure your student is ready. Have an escape plan drawn up; students should check with their resident advisor if they're living in a dorm to find out the school's escape route for that particular dorm. They should find two exits from their room and memorize the number of doors to the nearest exit. Chances are good that when exiting their room in the event of a fire, they may have to crawl to safety and their vision may be impaired. Memorizing the number of doors may be the only way to get to fresh air.

Instruct your student never to tamper with smoke alarms. They are installed for a purpose — to keep them and their roommates safe.

According to Ed Comeau, director of the Center for Campus Fire Safety,

Belchertown, MA, students should know exactly what their college requires and what procedures are in place for evacuating the dormitory in the event of a fire.

The important thing to remember is when a fire alarm sounds, get out. If egress is not safe, close and seal the door with wet towels and call 911 to report the residence hall is on fire. Students should not risk trying to get out if the way is unsafe. Many fatalities occur when people try to get out of fires on their own. **S+H**



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