

Fire Safety for Off-Campus / Commuter Students

History of Campus Fire Safety

On January 19, 2000, three students were killed and 62 students and firefighters were injured when a fire erupted at Seton Hall University. Originally started as a prank, this fire proved to be one of the deadliest college fires in recent history, as three couches in a third-floor lounge approached 1500°F in less than 5 minutes.

In this tragedy's aftermath, then NYS Governor George Pataki created a Task Force on Campus Fire Safety in February 2000. The result of this task force today is annual fire inspections of all NYS colleges and universities, with the assistance of the NYS Office of Fire Prevention and Control (OFPC) and fire safety training for all students.

Off-Campus Housing

SUNY Poly provides on-campus housing that meets building and fire safety standards. Dormitories are provided with a variety of life safety provisions such as smoke, heat, and carbon monoxide detection, alarm monitoring, sprinklers, and fire extinguishers. Fire drills are conducted on a regular basis. On-campus residential living is safe.

Unfortunately, off-campus housing may not meet the same fire safety standards as on-campus housing. Therefore, this document is provided to increase fire safety awareness for our commuter / off-campus student population.

The information presented has been collected from a variety of sources including Hamilton College, Ohio State

SUNY Poly is committed to fire safety as a priority in student residences and other campus facilities. However, no fire alarm, detection or suppression system can 100% guarantee that a fire related tragedy will not occur at SUNY Poly, as most OFPC violations tend to be behavioral in nature (e.g. use of extension cords, candles, smoking, burning incense, covered smoke detectors, etc...).



University, Center for Campus Safety, NFPA, and the US Fire Administration.

Please contact the Office of Environmental Health & Safety if you have any questions regarding this information or fire safety concerns.

Fire Safety by the Numbers

- From 2011-2015, U.S. fire departments responded to an estimated annual average of 4,100 structure fires in dormitories, fraternities, sororities, and other related properties. These fires caused annual averages of 35 civilian injuries and \$14 million in direct property damage.*
- September and October were the peak months for fires in dormitory properties, and they are more common during the evening hours between 5 p.m. and 9 p.m.*
- Cooking equipment was involved in nearly nine out of ten reported fires in dormitory-type properties (87%).*
- From 2000 - 2018, 92 fatal fires have been documented that occurred on a college campus, in Greek housing or in off-campus housing within 3-miles of the campus – claiming a total of 132 victims**:
 - 79 fires have occurred in off-campus housing claiming 113 victims
 - 7 fires have occurred in on-campus building or residence halls claiming 9 victims
 - 6 fires have occurred in Greek housing claiming 10 victims
- Of the 92 documented**:
 - 14 were intentionally set claiming 22 victims
 - 38 were accidental – includes cooking, candles, smoking or electrical claiming 51 victims]
 - 40 of the fires the cause was never determined – or the cause was not available at press time. These fires claimed 59 victims.

- From January 2000 – May 2015 smoke alarms were either missing or tampered with (disconnected or battery removed) in 58 percent of fatal campus fires.***

- 94 percent of fatal campus fires occurred off-campus***

**Source: NFPA's "Structure Fires in Dormitories, Fraternities, Sororities and Barracks" report*

***Source: The Center for Campus Fire Safety*

****Source: U.S. Fire Administration*

Enhance Your Home Fire Safety

Top 25 tips to be fire safe:

1. If a fire breaks out, GET OUT and STAY OUT. Call 911
2. Know two ways out, especially from bedrooms
3. Don't leave cooking or candles unattended – turn off appliances and blow out candles when leaving a room
4. Use flameless candles
5. Make sure cigarettes are extinguished. Don't smoke in bed
6. Don't store gasoline, lighter fluid, etc. inside your house or apartment
7. Keep flammable / combustible materials at least 3 feet away from water heaters, furnaces and other sources of flames (do not store items in furnace/water heater closets)
8. Keep space heaters 3 feet away from combustible items
9. Heavy things placed on top of a cord can wear out the cord and cause a fire
10. Keep cords from under carpets where people walk on them. They can wear out and cause a fire
11. Keep things that burn, like scarves or other clothes, off lamps
12. Keep curtains away from light bulbs. Bulbs can get hot and start a fire
13. Use a light bulb with the right number of watts
14. Don't overload electrical circuits
15. Do not use frayed or worn cords for charging your phone, tablet or laptop
16. Be VERY careful when charging battery powered devices
17. Use surge protected power strips
18. Avoid extension cords
19. Keep exit ways clear
20. Keep doors closed when sleeping
21. Don't use a grill on a porch or within 10 feet of a building
22. DO NOT use water to put out a grease fire
23. DO NOT cook or smoke or use candles if you have used alcohol, are sleepy, or have other impairment
24. If a fire starts inside a microwave, keep door closed
25. Be careful when cooking and follow instructions for microwavable food -

How to cook popcorn -

https://youtu.be/xsCNHR_JKuM

Smoke Alarms in Your Home

A properly maintained smoke alarm is the only thing in your home that can alert you to a fire 24 hours a day, seven days a week. A smoke alarm that does not work, either because of age or because it has a dead battery or missing battery, is the same as having no smoke alarm at all.

Almost two-thirds of home fire deaths in 2005-2009 resulted from fires in homes with no smoke alarms or no working smoke alarms. According to the National Fire Protection Association, a working smoke alarm reduces the risk of fire death by 50%.



Smoke Alarm Placement

New York State law requires your property owner to provide a working smoke alarm on each level of your home, including the basement. If one of your floors does not have a smoke alarm, or if one of your smoke alarms does not work, contact your property owner / manager immediately.

Generally, alarms should be placed in the center of a ceiling or, if on a wall, they should be 6 to 12 inches below the ceiling. For maximum warning, smoke alarms should be installed on every level of the home, outside sleeping areas, and inside bedrooms.

In addition to the smoke alarms provided by your property owner, you can purchase additional alarms online or at your local hardware store.

Test Your Smoke Alarm Monthly

When smoke alarms fail to operate, it is usually because batteries are missing, disconnected or dead. Almost one-quarter of the smoke alarm failures are due to dead batteries. A smoke alarm is a critical early warning device; so test your smoke alarm monthly, your safety and the safety of others could depend on it.

Testing your alarm is the only way to know if it is functioning.

1. Press and hold the test button
2. Wait for smoke alarm to beep - *If the smoke alarm does not beep, and you have installed new batteries, replace the smoke alarm.*

Signs you need a new smoke alarm or battery:

1. The smoke alarm makes short beeps regularly, or
2. The smoke alarm is more than 10 years old and has exceeded its lifespan.

You may need to change the location of the smoke alarm if the alarm often gives false (nuisance) alarms (from cooking or steam from showers).

Get to know your smoke detector - https://youtu.be/EUem_V13HnY

Carbon Monoxide Alarm on Each Floor

Carbon monoxide is a poisonous gas that is colorless, odorless, tasteless, combustible, and deadly. A carbon monoxide detector is just as important as a smoke alarm because it provides an early warning that can prevent serious injury or death.

Carbon monoxide is the by-product of fuel combustion. If you have a gas appliance, such as a stove, furnace, or water heater, you are at risk of carbon monoxide poisoning. Over time, carbon monoxide can build up and cause loss of consciousness and even death.

The most common symptoms of carbon monoxide poisoning are Headache, Dizziness, Weakness, Nausea, Vomiting, Chest pain, and Confusion.

You can prevent carbon monoxide poisoning by making sure your property owner has a qualified technician maintain the heating system, water heater, and any other gas, oil, or fuel burning appliance each year. Make sure vents for the dryer, furnace, stove and fireplace are clear of snow and other debris.

You also can reduce your risk of carbon monoxide poisoning by installing and maintaining carbon monoxide alarms inside your home to provide early warning of dangerous carbon monoxide levels.

Install carbon monoxide alarms in a central location outside each separate sleeping area and on every level of your home. You can purchase a plug-in carbon monoxide detector online or at your local hardware store.

If you already have a carbon monoxide detector, test it monthly by pushing the test button, change the batteries twice a year, and replace it if it is more than seven years old.

Combined smoke and carbon monoxide detectors are available. Beginning in 2019, all smoke or carbon monoxide detectors that are available will have a 10-year non-replaceable battery. When the battery runs out, the detector needs to be replaced.

Fire Extinguisher on Each Floor

A fire extinguisher can confine and possibly put out a small fire, resulting in saved lives and property. If you purchase a fire extinguisher, select an "ABC" extinguisher. An ABC fire extinguisher is a multi-purpose fire extinguisher that can be used on:

A: Ordinary combustible materials, such as cloth, wood, rubber, paper, and many plastics

B: Flammable liquids, such as grease, gasoline, oil, and oil-based paints

C: Electrical appliances

When to use a Fire Extinguisher

Use a fire extinguisher only if:

- All residents have evacuated the building and the fire department has been called
- The room is not filled with smoke
- You have an unblocked exit to escape
- The fire is confined to a small area and is not growing
- You feel comfortable using the fire extinguisher

How to use a Fire Extinguisher

Remember the word “PASS” when you use a fire extinguisher:

- Pull the pin and hold the extinguisher with the nozzle pointed toward the fire
- Aim low and point the nozzle at the base of the fire
- Squeeze the lever slowly and evenly
- Sweep the nozzle from side to side

How to use a Fire Extinguisher - <https://youtu.be/mqW0h2AVftk>



Emergency Escape

Your ability to escape a fire depends on advance warning from smoke alarms and advance planning. You and everyone else you live with should have an escape plan in the event of a fire. If a fire starts, you only have a few minutes to escape before poisonous smoke and flames engulf your home. Quick escape requires a plan.

Create an escape plan that includes the following:

- Two exits for every room
- An outside meeting place (e.g. neighbor's house, a light post, mailbox, or stop sign) a safe distance in front of your home where everyone can meet after they've escaped.

If your home has two floors, everyone in an upstairs bedroom must be able to escape from second floor rooms. Escape ladders can be placed in or near windows to provide an additional escape route if your primary exit is blocked by fire.

Get Out Alive

If you get caught in a fire situation, survival is your first priority. You do not have time to do anything but escape.

- Know two ways out
- Feel the door
 - 1) If it's hot - don't open it. Instead, use your second way out, or go to a window and call for help
 - 2) If it's cool - stay low and open it slowly. Check for smoke and fire before going out
- Get out before calling 911
- If a fire alarm pull station is available, pull it on the way out
- Keep the fire from spreading by closing the door behind you
- Knock on doors and yell "FIRE" as you leave

Crawl low to the floor

- Thick smoke can make it impossible to see. Toxic chemicals in the smoke can become deadly in seconds
- Heat and smoke rise—the freshest, safest air is close to the floor. Even fire fighters crawl low

What if you can't get out?

- Use your cell phone and call for help
- Try to get someone's attention
- Close and seal your door to keep smoke out
- Hang or wave something from the window to get attention
- Yell out the window

No Combustible Materials Stored Indoors or Near Heating Appliances

Your furnace, water heater, stovetop, oven, and grill are heat sources that can cause a fire by igniting nearby flammable or combustible materials.

- If your furnace and water heater are in your basement, keep combustible and flammable materials at least 3 feet away. If your furnace and water heater are in a closet, keep the entire closet clear of any items. Do not use your furnace and water heater closet as storage.

Fire Videos

- **THE ALARMING TRUTH** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MrB0OSxj0os>) - a short film depicting a fire occurring at an off-campus residence and the unfortunate outcome that affects those involved.
- **AFTER THE FIRE (Trailer)** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IJ7vBKPQLAY>) – Trailer for a film documenting the struggle of two survivors of the Seton Hall fire.