

# CAMPUS Firewatch™

NOVEMBER 2000

From the Editor .....2

NFPA Fire Protection

Handbook - Campus Fire

Safety Chapter .....3

Candle Industry Facts .....3

Legislation Update .....6

Campus Fire Log .....8

Occupant Awareness - Fraternity

Fire Safety in State College .....12

## Halloween at Seton Hall

On October 27, there was a Halloween decorating contest in Boland Hall at Seton Hall University. According to Shannon Allen, an account manager for the University's Division of Student Affairs, sixteen out of 18 wings of Boland Hall were participating in the decorating contest.

The contest started at 10:00 a.m. An official from the South Orange Fire Department was on campus at the time, and he heard of the decorating contest and stopped by. According to Allen, the official found unsafe decorations, and asked the university to remove them. These included construction paper on the walls, streamers, hay, leaves, strobe lights, garbage bags, food and toilet paper. The state fire marshal reported to Campus Firewatch that the floor was "ankle-high" with combustible decorations.

Because of the conditions, the contest was stopped and the decorations

## Campus Fire Safety Forum II

Ed Comeau, *writer-tech.com*

This is the first installment of a two-part report on Forum II.

At the NFPA Fall Education Conference, there were two sessions devoted to campus fire safety. A group of ten speakers, over two days, spoke before rooms that were filled to capacity with attendees.

On Sunday, November 12, the session *Student Housing Fire Safety: A National Perspective - Protecting Our Most Valuable Resource* was held. This session was sponsored by the NFPA Education Section and featured four presenters.

The first was Bonnie Woodruff, who lost her only son in the tragic fraternity fire in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. Mrs. Woodruff's presentation was one about the emotional impact that her family suffered when her son, Ben, was killed in the Phi Gamma Delta fire on Mother's Day, 1996. Often, people don't understand the impact that a tragic death such as Ben Woodruff's can have on a family. Mrs. Woodruff eloquently spoke of the impact that Ben's death had on her family and on the institution.

Mrs. Woodruff started her presentation by showing a videotape developed by the Eau Claire Fire Department called "Get Out and Stay Alive." This tape, produced and distributed by the United States Fire Administration, is targeted towards today's students and explains the importance of fire prevention and the role that the students can play in helping to provide a fire-safe environment in their residence hall, fraternity or sorority.

The next speaker was Dr. Fred Mowrer from the University of Maryland. Dr. Mowrer has been actively involved in the area of campus fire safety for a number of years. In 1999 he was instrumental in the development and production of a video tape targeted towards college and university administrators that explains the need and value of fire safety on their campuses.

Called "Ready to Respond," the tape provides an excellent overview of the importance of fire alarms and sprinklers in academic residence halls. This tape, which is available from the USFA, free of charge, was developed in order to educate the administrators on the value of sprinklers and fire alarm systems, as well as dispel some common myths and misconceptions regarding these systems.

Buddy Dewar from the National Fire Sprinkler Association followed Dr. Mowrer. Mr. Dewar focused on the issues surrounding the installation of sprinkler systems. His presentation covered the aspects of selecting contractors, funding and installation strategies.

Wrapping up the Sunday session was Ed Comeau, the publisher of Campus Firewatch. Mr. Comeau provided the attendees with a national perspective of the fire safety problems on- and off-campus. He also was discussed the recent legislation that has been working through the federal, state and local legislations.

Continued on page 4

# FROM THE Editor

"Constant vigilance." That was what was stressed by Chapel Hill Fire Chief Dan Jones. In an interview in the May issue of Campus Firewatch, Chief Jones said that they have to constantly watch what is occurring in student housing and stay on top of it to avoid a repeat of the tragic fire that struck his community.

This was demonstrated rather dramatically at Seton Hall last month.

Seton Hall has become one of the watershed incidents when it comes to campus fire safety. The death of three young students spurred the state to implement an incredibly broad-reaching sprinkler mandate. The University has implemented new, more stringent fire safety regulations. They are conducting monthly, unannounced inspections to identify and eliminate fire hazards. Over the last summer, every dormitory at Seton Hall was equipped with a fire sprinkler system. All of the resident hall staff went through specialized fire safety training, which included a live burn demonstration. The incoming students were given fire safety orientation.

Yet, despite all of this heightened awareness, the potential for a devastating fire still exists.

During a Halloween decorating contest, a South Orange Fire Department official found a hallway in Boland Hall, the very site of the January tragedy, strewn with combustible material that included toilet paper, construction paper, leaves and straw. "Ankle deep" was how it was described to Campus Firewatch by the New Jersey state fire marshal.

The contest had started at 10:00 in the morning. By 3:00 in the afternoon University officials had stopped the contest and removed the debris at the request of the fire department. The question this raises, however, is why did it take fire department intervention to stop this from happening? Why didn't the students or university staff realize that perhaps this was an unsafe action?

This incident demonstrates the need for continued, ongoing supervision, education, training and vigilance in residence halls and Greek housing. Did the students in Boland Hall know that what they were doing was creating an unsafe condition? Perhaps not. Did the students who were filling the basement of their fraternity in Chapel Hill with bamboo to create a "jungle theme" realize the potential risk? Or the fraternity where the furnace broke down and they brought in over a dozen space heaters instead of repairing the furnace-did they think they were placing people in danger? What about the student at Hampshire College who put a pan of oil on the stove in a residence hall and then left. Did she intend to start a fire that, fortunately, was controlled by two sprinklers? In all likelihood, no.

Human behavior is the one aspect of fire safety that is the most difficult to predict or control. We must make stronger efforts to educate these students because, as we are seeing, perhaps the greatest danger to them is the actions of their fellow students.

*Ed Comeau, the editor of Campus Firewatch, is the former chief fire investigator for the National Fire Protection Association. He began his involvement in campus fire safety as a fire fighter with the Amherst, Massachusetts, fire department while pursuing his degree in civil engineering. He can be reached at [publisher@campus-firewatch.com](mailto:publisher@campus-firewatch.com).*

## CAMPUS Firewatch™

NOVEMBER 2000

Campus Firewatch is a publication of writer-tech.com, llc, a technical writing firm specializing in fire safety. All of the material contained in Campus Firewatch is copyrighted and may not be reproduced or distributed without permission.

Campus fire safety is a complex issue. The information in this newsletter is provided to help you in your efforts to provide as fire-safe a community as possible. However, it is no replacement for professional advice. For further assistance, contact your local fire department.

### Subscribe Today!

You can subscribe to Campus Firewatch, online, and receive your own copy each month, right to your email address. Simply visit our web site at [www.campus-fire-watch.com](http://www.campus-fire-watch.com).

### Reprints

We welcome reprints of the articles that appear in Campus Firewatch. Please contact us at [publisher@campus-firewatch.com](mailto:publisher@campus-firewatch.com) for permission to reprint material.

### Campus Firewatch™

a publication of writer-tech.com, llc  
P.O. Box 1046  
Belchertown, MA 01007  
PH: (413) 323-6002  
FX: (413) 323-5295  
[publisher@campus-firewatch.com](mailto:publisher@campus-firewatch.com)  
[www.campus-firewatch.com](http://www.campus-firewatch.com)

### Design and Layout:

McCusker Communications, Inc.  
Westwood, MA  
PH: (781) 461-9664

## NFPA Fire Protection Handbook- Campus Fire Safety Chapter

The upcoming 19th edition of the NFPA Fire Protection Handbook is going to have a new chapter on campus fire safety, which NFPA has asked Ed Comeau, the publisher of Campus Firewatch, to write.

Since this is a new chapter, we have a great opportunity to create a document that will provide people with the best possible information to aid them in doing their jobs well. The question for everyone is....

What would YOU like to see in this chapter?

We are very interested in getting as much input as possible from those of you who are living with the problems and issues every day, and solving them. Any suggestions, case studies, successes or failures that would help illustrate a point would be useful. Photographs of fires, unique fire protection installations or anything that will be informative are welcome.

Please don't hesitate to get in touch with us by email, phone or regular mail with any material or suggestions you may have. By working together this can be a useful tool for the campus fire safety professional.

**Please contact Ed Comeau at [publisher@campus-firewatch.com](mailto:publisher@campus-firewatch.com) or by telephone at 413-323-6002.**

**HALLOWEEN** - continued from page 1

were removed by 3:00 that afternoon. Officials from the South Orange Fire Department and the South Orange town administrator's office were unavailable for comment at press time.

Boland Hall was the site of the tragic fire in January 2000 that killed three students. Since that time Seton Hall has taken an aggressive stance towards fire safety. During the summer, all of their residence halls were equipped with fire sprinkler systems. There is an ongoing program of unannounced fire safety inspections once a month, which, according to Director Craig Allen from the Department of Housing and Residence Life at Seton Hall "we are finding fewer violations."

When asked why this problem arose in the first place, Shannon Allen stated that it was a "case of students being excited about a program in their hall." She went to say that we "continue to need to educate the students about how to integrate their creativity with safety, and this is a challenge for everyone."

Before Halloween, an article had appeared in the school newspaper, the Setonian. In this article, Craig Allen outlined the university regulations, as well as some guidelines regarding decorating. Both Craig Allen and Shannon Allen emphasized that they want the students to enjoy the holidays, but safety is a priority for the university.

## Candle Industry Facts

*The following information was taken from the National Candle Association website ([www.candles.org](http://www.candles.org)).*

- Consumer retail sales for U.S. candles are projected to total more than \$2.3 billion in 2000.
- The candle industry has almost tripled in the past three or four years.
- The U.S. candle market is typically separated into seasonal (Christmas holiday) business, at roughly 35 percent, and non-seasonal business, at about 65 percent. Candle shipments increase substantially during the third quarter of the year for the Christmas season, since candles play a large role this time of year (religious, gifts and decoration).
- Candle manufacturers' research shows that 96 percent of all candles purchased are by women.
- Candles are used in seven out of ten households.
- A majority of consumers burn candles between one and three times per week; half of consumers burn one to two candles at a time.

Campus Fire Safety Forum II - continued from page 1

## Campus Fire Safety Forum II

On Monday, November 13, Campus Fire Safety Forum II was held before another packed room. This forum is a continuation of the landmark forum that was first held at NFPA headquarters in August, 1999. At the time of the first forum, campus fire safety was of a concern, but it had not been raised to the level of awareness that we are seeing today as a result of Seton Hall and Bloomsburg. As a result of these two tragedies, and others that are occurring across the country, Forum I was certainly "ahead of its time," and Forum II expanded upon the lessons that emerged out of Forum I.

The focus of this forum, which was put together by Campus Firewatch's publisher, was on laws and ordinances. Since Forum I, there had been a number of pieces of legislation introduced at the federal and state level focusing on campus fire safety. In addition, there are a number of local ordinances enacted requiring that Greek houses be equipped with fire sprinklers. These ordinances have been enacted by agencies with the foresight to recognize the potential problem and address it.

This year the Chemical Safety Health and Environmental Management Association (CSHEMA) joined NFPA and USFA in co-sponsoring Forum II. CSHEMA is a professional association of institutions and individuals that are responsible for managing a variety of issues on campuses, including fire safety.

Vicki Wade from the NFPA Education Section, Larry Maruskin from USFA and Mike Halligan from CSHEMA welcomed the attendees and kicked off the forum.

## Federal Legislation

The lead-off speaker was Tony O'Neill, NFPA's assistant vice president for governmental affairs. He provided an overview of how legislation is developed and how it moves through the federal system.

Traditionally, fire safety has been considered to be a local issue, and the federal government has not been funding it for

this reason. This changed somewhat in 1989 when Congressman Curt Weldon, a former fire chief from Pennsylvania, formed the Congressional Fire Service Caucus. This caucus, which presently has 320 members, is the largest one in Congress.

According to O'Neill, a large number of bills are introduced each year in the House of Representatives and the Senate. However, many of these are "feel good" bills that are introduced on the behalf of their constituents. "Members of Congress often file bills merely to please constituents (voters) with no intention to pursue the bill into law," said O'Neill.

Once legislation is introduced, it then moves into a committee for discussion and study. An instrumental person in determining if legislation moves forward or "dies in committee" is the committee's chairperson. If that person supports the legislation, then it will have an opportunity to move out of committee and be put before the entire Senate or House of Representatives. However, if the chairperson doesn't support it, the chances of the legislation moving forward is slim. This is where it is critical to voice support to the chairperson on legislation to ensure that it does survive.

Any legislation that is going to require funding has two phases. First is authorization. This is the legislation that "authorizes" an agency of the government to spend funds up to a given dollar amount. However, this does not provide them with the funding, which is contained within appropriations legislation. This is where it becomes more difficult.

Because of the requirement to balance the budget, new programs requiring new funding are scrutinized very closely. Furthermore, with the recent concern over the viability of programs such as Social Security, which is an entitlement program, discretionary spending gets a lower priority over entitlements.

There are basically two types of legislation before Congress concerned with campus fire safety-those that O'Neill refers to as "disclosure," which generally don't require

funding, and those that will require funding, such as S2100 which is calling for the installation of sprinklers in residence halls across the country.

Legislation such as H4504 Higher Education Technical Amendments Act of 2000, which is part of the Technical Amendments to the Higher Education Act is legislation that O'Neill refers to as having "legs." This means that it does have a chance of passing Congress because it does not require any federal funding and is tied in with other legislation that will carry it along. However, the prospects on S2100 are certainly slim for this year.

Another factor is that one of the members that co-sponsored S2100, Sen. Frank Lautenberg from New Jersey retired this year. In addition, since it did not pass this year, it will have to be reintroduced when Congress reconvenes in January 2001.

The bottom line is that the prospects for most of the legislation that was introduced for this year is slim, with the exception of H4504.

## Crafting Legislation in New Jersey

Following O'Neill was Jerry Naylis. Naylis was instrumental in helping the landmark legislation in New Jersey become law.

Naylis wears several different hats. He is an account manager with FM Global, based in New Jersey and is very active in the industrial fire world. In addition to this, however, he also serves on the New Jersey Fire Safety Commission, and he is also president of the International Association of Arson Investigators.

Immediately following the tragedy at Seton Hall, Naylis realized that there was an opportunity to move forward on legislation that could make a significant difference at institutions across the state. To accomplish this, it was critically important that a coalition of various parties be brought together to help craft the legislation and ensure that it made it through the legislative process.

More importantly, however, in the immediate period following the fire, was the need to focus the media attention on the inci-

dent and how the tragedy could have been avoided. According to Naylis, "The biggest banner headline was if the buildings had been sprinklered, the students would not have died. This sent a powerful message."

Naylis gave an example of another reason to provide the media with accurate information. "Are they (the media) going to get a story? Yes! So you can either help them, or they are going to go out and find the story on their own." By helping them, he emphasized, you can insure that they have accurate information and are helping your efforts.

Knowing that it was important to have accurate information available for the legislators, the coalition started collecting information on the present state of fire protection in the state's institutions. "The first thing they (legislators) wanted to know at the hearings was -how big is the problem," said Naylis. "If we had said -I don't know," we would have gotten nowhere-if you give bad information to the legislators, you lose credibility."

The coalition inventoried the institutions and their housing and determined that 70 to 80% of the beds were not in sprinklered buildings. This was about 36,000 beds across the state. By working with the sprinkler contractors, they were able to determine that it would cost about \$6.50 per square foot to provide sprinkler protection for all of the unprotected facilities.

Another tragic event helped to spur the legislators to action. Two months to the day, after Seton Hall, there was another fire at Bloomsburg University in Pennsylvania that killed three students. One of the students who died in this fire came from New Jersey. He was buried out of the same church that one of the students from Seton hall had been buried from just a few months earlier. "This was the tie that caused fraternities and sororities to be included in the same bill as dormitories," said Naylis.

Money is always an issue, and it was a concern in this legislation because installing sprinklers was going to obviously require funds coming from somewhere. "Having a budget surplus in the state was key" to helping diffuse this

argument, said Naylis.

The final program will involve a \$90 million fund that will give loans out at no interest to state entities, and 2% interest to Greek and private organizations. With a payback period of 15 years, this will provide a substantial source of funds to pay for the sprinkler installations.

Another provision that was inserted into the legislation at the last minute was the elimination of standby water fees. These are fees imposed by the water companies for being allowed to tap into their water distribution system. In some cases these charges ranged from ten to fifty thousand dollars per year. By eliminating these fees, another substantial cost saving is being passed onto the institutions.

### Implementing Legislation

George Miller, the chief of Fire Code Enforcement for the New Jersey Division of Fire Safety spoke about the issues involved with implementing the legislation, now that they were successful in getting it signed into law.

In 1981, a number of people died in fires in board and care facilities. As a result of these tragedies, the legislature started taking a closer look at how fire codes are enforced in the state. What was found was that a number of state agencies had jurisdictional authority over board and cares, with different regulations. However, none of them were enforcing all of their regulations, which may have had an impact on the loss of life.

As a result, "a broad, all-encompassing building code had been passed that was enforced uniformly throughout the state," reported Miller. Another event that helped the passage of the building code was the MGM and Las Vegas Hilton fires. Both of these fires occurred while the board and care fires were being investigated, drawing attention to the need for improved fire safety regulations. Casinos were also being built in Atlantic City at this time, which helped to spur this legislation, said Miller.

"Technically, we didn't need new legislation after Seton Hall," said Miller, because

they already had the ability to amend the state building code using regulatory authority. "What we did need was the clout and the money-if we tried to amend using a regulatory process, we would have run into a block wall." The big question would have been "where is the money coming from?" It was imperative, stated Miller, to have the \$90 million fund tied to the legislation.

Another problem was that the New Jersey Division of Fire Safety did not have the ability to inspect other state agencies and impose fines as result of these inspections. "With the new legislation we were able to put some teeth into it," said Miller. The Division can now charge inspection fees and fine other state agencies.

Currently, out of the 41 institutions required to comply with the legislation, 40 have submitted plans to Miller's office.

### The second part of the report on Campus Fire Safety Forum II will appear in the December issue of Campus Firewatch.

Visit the Campus Firewatch website at [www.campus-firewatch.com](http://www.campus-firewatch.com) to download PowerPoint presentations from the NFPA Fall Education Conference.

# LEGISLATION

# Update

## Legislation

**S 2100**

**College Fire Prevention Act**

### Jurisdiction

Federal

### Sponsor

Sen. John Edwards (D-NC)  
United States Senate  
225 Dirksen Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510  
202-224-3154  
senator@edwards.senate.gov

### Cosponsors

Senator Spencer Abraham (R-MI)  
United States Senate  
329 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510  
Phone: (202) 224-4822  
Fax: (202) 224-8834  
michigan@abraham.senate.gov  
http://www.senate.gov/~abraham/

Senator Christopher Dodd (D-CT)  
448 Russell Office Bldg.  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510  
(202) 224-2823 (tel)  
(202) 224-1083 (fax)  
Senator@dodd.senate.gov  
http://www.senate.gov/~dodd/

Senator Richard Durbin (D-IL)  
364 Russell Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510  
(202) 224-2152 (tel)  
(202) 228-0400 (fax)  
dick@durbin.senate.gov  
http://www.senate.gov/~durbin/

Senator Frank Lautenberg (D-NJ)  
United States Senate  
506 Senate Hart Building  
Washington, DC 20510  
(202) 224-4744 (tel)

(202) 224-9707 (fax)  
frank\_lautenberg@lautenberg.senate.gov  
http://www.senate.gov/~lautenberg/

Senator Robert Torricelli (D-NJ)  
United States Senate  
113 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510  
(202) 224-3224 (tel)  
(202) 224-8567 (fax)  
senatortorricelli@torricelli.senate.gov

### Funding

\$100,000,000

### Facilities

Dormitories, fraternities or sororities

### Status

Referred to the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions on 2/24/00. Still in committee and no action has been taken since it was referred to committee.

### Summary

Authorizes appropriations for competitive grants to help provide fire sprinkler systems in student housing and dormitories.

Authorizes the Secretary of Education to award such grants to States, private or public colleges or universities, fraternities, or sororities to assist them in providing such systems.

Requires grant recipients to provide matching funds equal to at least one-half of project costs.

Directs the Comptroller General to gather, and report to Congress, data on the number of college and university housing facilities and dormitories that have and do not have fire sprinkler systems and other forms of built-in fire protection mechanisms.

## Legislation

**S 2108**

**HR 3895**

**Campus Fire Safety Right to Know Act**

### Jurisdiction

Federal

### Sponsors

Senator Robert Toricelli (D-NJ)  
United States Senate  
113 Dirksen Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510  
(202) 224-3224 (tel)  
(202) 224-8567 (fax)  
senator@torricelli.senate.gov

Representative Bill Pascrell  
1722 Longworth Building (HOB)  
Washington, DC 20515  
(202) 225-5751 (tel)  
(202) 225-5782 (fax)  
bill.pascrell@mail.house.gov

### Funding

N/A

### Facilities

Campuses nationwide

### Status

Referred to the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions on 2/28/00.

Referred to the House Committee on Education and the Workforce on 3/9/00.

### Summary

Amends the Higher Education Act of 1965 to require each eligible institution participating in any program under title IV (Student Assistance) to: (1) prepare, publish, and distribute to all current students and employees, and to any applicant for enrollment or

employment upon request, an annual fire safety report which discloses specified types of information about that institution's campus fire safety standards and practices; (2) make timely reports to the campus community on fires that are reported to local fire departments and the incidence of false fire alarms on campus, to aid in preventing similar occurrences; (3) maintain a log recording all fires reported to local fire departments and all false fire alarms, open to public inspection except where disclosure of such information is prohibited by law; and (4) submit annually to the Secretary of Education a copy of statistics on campus occurrences of fires and false fire alarms.

Directs the Secretary to: (1) review such statistics; (2) make copies available to the public; (3) identify exemplary fire safety policies, procedures, and practices, and disseminate information concerning those policies, procedures, and practices that have proven effective in the reduction of campus fires; and (4) report to the Congress analyses of the current status of fire safety systems in college and university facilities, and of the appropriate fire safety standards to apply to these facilities, as well as cost estimates and recommendations.

## Legislation

**S 2178**

**HR 3831**

**Fire Safe Dorm Act of 2000**

### Jurisdiction

Federal

### Sponsors

Senator Frank Lautenberg  
United States Senate  
506 Senate Hart Building  
Washington, DC 20510  
(202) 224-4744 (tel)  
(202) 224-9707 (fax)  
frank\_lautenberg@lautenberg.senate.gov  
<http://www.senate.gov/~lautenberg/>  
<http://www.senate.gov/~torricelli/>

Representative Carolyn Maloney  
2430 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515  
(202) 225-7944 (tel)  
(202) 225-4709 (fax)  
rep.carolyn.maloney@mail.house.gov  
<http://www.house.gov/maloney/>

### Funding

N/A

### Facilities

Campuses nationwide

### Status

Referred to the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions on 3/2/00. Still in committee and no action has been taken.

Referred to the House Subcommittee on Basic Research on 3/9/00. Still in committee.

### Summary

The objective of this bill is to amend the Higher Education Act of 1965 to require colleges and universities to disclose to students and their parents the incidents of fires in dormitories, and their plans to reduce fire safety hazards in dormitories, to require the United States Fire Administration to establish fire safety standards for dormitories, and for other purposes.

## Legislation

**HR 4504**

**Higher Education Technical Amendments of 2000**

### Jurisdiction

Federal

### Sponsor

Representative Buck McKeon  
2242 Rayburn HOB  
Washington D.C. 20515  
(202) 225-1956 (tel)  
(202) 226-0683 (fax)  
telltuck@mail.house.gov  
<http://www.house.gov/mckeon/>

### Funding

N/A

### Facilities

Campuses nationwide

### Status

Referred to the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions on 6/13/00. Still in committee and no action has been taken.

## Summary

This legislation has several amendments attached to it pertaining to campus fire safety. They include providing a description of campus fire safety features, reports on the number of fires and false alarms, and an analysis of current fire safety systems and plans for upgrading fire protection.

## Legislation

**HB 2458**

**Dormitory Automatic Sprinkler Act**

### Jurisdiction

Pennsylvania

### Sponsors

Representative Michael McGeehan  
221B South Office  
Harrisburg, PA 17120  
(717) 772-4029 (tel)  
mcgeehan@pahouse.net  
[www.pahouse.net/McGeehan/index.htm](http://www.pahouse.net/McGeehan/index.htm)

### Funding

\$100,000,000

### Facilities

Dormitories and Greek housing

### Status

On October 11, this legislation was passed by the House on a vote of 190 to 1. It has now moved to the state Senate for action.

### Summary

Representative Michael McGeehan introduced House Bill 2458, the Dormitory Automatic Sprinkler Act, on April 11, 2000. This bill calls for the installation of sprinklers in all new dormitories, existing dormitories and Greek housing within five years. It proposes the appropriation of \$100,000,000 to fund a sprinkler loan fund for low interest loans.

# CAMPUS Fire Log

---

The following are brief summaries of incidents that have occurred in college occupancies. Unless noted otherwise, they have been taken from press accounts and have not been verified for accuracy. Several of these incidents will be profiled in future issues of Campus Firewatch.

*If you have an incident that you would like to contribute for this column, please contact us at [publisher@campus-firewatch.com](mailto:publisher@campus-firewatch.com).*

**October 16, 2000**

## **University of Mississippi** **Oxford, Mississippi**

A fire in Stockard Hall, a residence hall, was caused by a candle that was left burning on a desk.

**October 18, 2000**

## **St. Louis University** **St. Louis, Missouri**

The compressor on a freezer containing hazardous materials exploded in a molecular biology laboratory. According to press reports, no radioactive contamination was found. There were about 15 people in the laboratory at the time of the explosion, which occurred at about 2:30 pm.

**October 19, 2000**

## **Penn State University** **State College, Pennsylvania**

A minor fire occurred in a lab at Penn State University. Smoke detectors activated and first arriving Police encountered a moderate smoke condition in the lab. The fire was extinguished using a portable fire extinguisher. Alpha Fire Company checked for extension using the Thermal Imaging Camera with no signs of extension found. Damage was confined to two ceiling fluorescent lights and an office chair. Initial investigation indicates fire originated at the lamp socket causing melting plastic from the light shield to drip on the cushion of the chair. Building was re-occupied after units cleared the scene.

**October 21, 2000**

## **Northeastern University** **Boston, MA**

A fire that started by an electrical power strip in a residence hall forced the evacuation of 100 students. According to press reports, the fire alarm never sounded and the police were required to knock on doors to evacuate the building. The sixth-floor room was engulfed in flames upon arrival.

**October 22, 2000**

## **North Dakota State University** **Fargo, North Dakota**

*The following information was obtained by Campus Firewatch from university and city officials.*

An off-campus apartment fire caused serious damage at the University Village in Fargo, North Dakota. According to officials, the fire started in the attic area of the building near a recessed light fixture.

The building, which was referred to as 'F Court' was a two-story structure that had 16 apartment-style units. Two students lived in each unit. The building was equipped with hallway, system smoke detectors, pull stations and heat detectors in the mechanical rooms. Activation of any of these devices would activate the building fire alarm system and transmit a signal to campus security.

There were single station smoke detectors in the individual units.

The fire occurred on a Saturday, shortly after 6:00 p.m. The fire started in the attic area above the level of the smoke detectors. It was first observed by the occupants of the adjacent building, who ran over and began knocking on individual apartment doors to alert the occupants. No one activated the pull stations.

According to a fire official, a number of the students did not believe that there really was a fire and did not evacuate. It took three attempts before one student finally evacuated his apartment. The official speculated that if the fire had occurred at night, with the delayed alarm, the outcome could have been catastrophic.

There were no injuries.

**Campus Fire Log** - continued from page 8

The building was a total loss. A number of the students on the second floor, on the north end, lost all of their belongings to the fire. Others in the building had their property damaged either by the fire, smoke or water.

**October 22, 2000**

### **Washington, DC**

A fire in a house killed one man who was sleeping in the basement that had only one means of egress. A college student who lived on the second floor of the house was not home at the time of the fire.

**October 25, 2000**

### **Santa Fe High School**

#### **Santa Fe, New Mexico**

A fire destroyed the administration in the center of the campus. The building contained the high school's mainframe computer as well as the main phone link for the campus. The damage was estimated between \$1 million and \$2 million. Santa Fe High School has a number of buildings that are spread out over several acres, similar to a college campus.

**October 27, 2000**

### **University of Massachusetts**

#### **Amherst, Massachusetts**

*The following information was obtained by Campus Firewatch from fire officials and during an on-site inspection of the fire scene.*

An off-campus house where five students lived was severely damaged by a fire that occurred at approximately 10:00 p.m.

The building where the fire occurred was a two-story, wood frame structure. It was occupied by either four or five students from the University of Massachusetts.

There were conflicting accounts of how the fire started. According to one report, the fire was caused when a student was attempting to use kerosene to refuel a Halloween decoration on the front porch. Another account was that the pumpkin ignited from the flame inside of it, and the fire spread to the porch.

It was reported that the occupants attempted to extinguish the fire, but were unsuccessful. They then left the front door of the house open, which allowed the fire to spread rapidly to the interior and up the stairway, which was immediately adjacent to the front door.

The building was a total loss and was subsequently demolished.

**October 28, 2000**

### **Pittsburg State University**

#### **Pittsburg, Kansas**

A fire that was caused by a power strip occurred in Heckert-Well Hall, killing about one-third of a collection of snakes, mammals, birds and other animals, as well as destroying tens of thousands of dollars of equipment.

**November 2, 2000**

### **Defiance College**

#### **Defiance, Ohio**

A fire was set over the weekend in a closet in Schomburg Auditorium. Most of the damage was caused by smoke, and the fire was contained to the closet.

**November 5, 2000**

### **University of Vermont**

#### **Burlington, Vermont**

*The following information was obtained by Campus Firewatch from fire department*



**Amherst fire fighters attack the fire started by a halloween decoration.**

Photo by Michael Medeiros



**The house was destroyed by fire,**



**The coffee table in the apartment of origin shows a dangerous combination.**

Photo by the Burlington Fire Department, used with permission.

officials.

A fire in a house off-campus rented by five students injured three of the occupants.

The building where the fire occurred was a wood, balloon-frame structure with three stories. The building was equipped with smoke detectors, and there were two in the apartment of origin. One was located in the hallway by the bedroom, and the other was located in the living room.

An exterior and interior stairway led to the third floor. However, they were not separate or remote from one another.

There were three apartments in the building. In the apartment of origin, on the third floor, there were four bedrooms.

At 6:08 a.m., the fire department responded to the house for a reported fire. Upon arrival, they were told that there were people trapped on the third floor. Firefighters entered the building via the exterior stairway and had to crawl beneath the flames until they found one unconscious male. He was removed from the building and was in respiratory arrest.

Search operations continued and an uncon-

scious female victim was found in one of the bedrooms. She was also removed from the building and was in respiratory arrest. A third victim was treated for injuries sustained when he and another male jumped from their bedroom windows onto the roof of a first story porch.

The fire was extinguished in 20 minutes, and damage was confined to the third-floor apartment. Damage was estimated to be approximately \$50,000.

The investigation determined that the fire started in the living room couch by improper disposal of smoking materials. There were the remains of alcohol bottles, candles and cigarettes found on the living room table.

According to fire officials, the fact that the stairways were not remote and separate was a contributing factor to one of the injuries that occurred.

**November 10, 2000**

**University of Miami  
Oxford, Ohio**

*Campus Firewatch obtained the following information from media reports, a city press release, fire department and university officials.*

A fire in an off-campus fraternity seriously injured one student.

The building where the fire occurred was the Sigma Chi fraternity. It is a three-story, masonry structure. The hallway outside the room of origin had been covered with wood paneling sometime in the past.

The building was equipped with single station, battery-operated smoke detectors in the hallways and in the individual rooms. The building was equipped with a local fire alarm system that could be activated by manual pull stations.

There were officially 45 people living in the building, but it was reported that there were an unknown number of guests in the building at the time of the fire.

The fire was reported to the fire department at 5:10 a.m. According to the occupant of room 208, he had lit a four-wick candle at approximately 3:00 a.m. while studying. At approximately 5:00 a.m., he went to take a shower and left the candle burning on a table with combustible materials nearby.

When he returned from the shower, he could hear the smoke detector in the room

sounding. He opened the door and observed the end of the couch on fire. He closed the door, went about 30 feet down the hall to get a friend, and they returned with a CO2 fire extinguisher and a pressurized water fire extinguisher, which was not charged.

They opened the door, and the room was heavily involved with fire. They discharged the CO2 fire extinguisher in the room and then retreated. Because of the heavy fire, they were not able to close the door. They began alerting the other occupants of the building, and someone pulling a manual pull station activated the local fire alarm system.

Upon arrival, the fire department reported smoke and fire extending out of second-story windows on the second floor. A crew went to the second floor, while another crew equipped with a thermal imaging camera went to the third floor. As they entered the third floor, which was heavily charged with smoke, they found a male victim in the bathroom. This victim was removed from the building and transported to the local hospital. He was then flown to a level1 trauma center in Dayton, Ohio. According to fire officials, he is recovering at this time.

The fire extended out of the room of origin through the open door and into the hallway, consuming the combustible wall paneling. It also extended to the third floor and the attic via the window. Three rooms were damaged by direct flame impingement. The fire chief estimated the loss at \$500,000.

Earlier in the evening, there had been a small fire in a room down the hall from room 208. A lit candle had been placed on top of a speaker, and had been vibrated off. It ignited some combustible materials, but was quickly extinguished. This is why the CO2 fire extinguisher that was used in the subsequent fire was positioned in the hallway.

The fire chief cited candles as becoming a significant problem in his community. He mentioned an incident where they had gone into a fraternity and found an unattended lit candle resting on a Styrofoam plate, on top of a blanket, resting on a pool table. He estimated that they are finding evidence of candles in 70 to 80% of the rooms where they conduct inspections. Often, they are located on the lower levels of bookcases, with combustible materials above them.

There will be more information on this fire in an upcoming issue of Campus Firewatch.

**November 14, 2000****Hampshire College**  
**Amherst, Massachusetts**

*The following information was obtained by Campus Firewatch from college and fire department officials.*

A fire occurred in an apartment-style residence hall.

The building where the fire occurred was a three-story, wood frame structure that had been built about 25 years ago. It was equipped with a sprinkler system.

At 4:43 p.m., the Amherst Fire Department responded to a report of an alarm sounding. Enroute, it was reported that the sprinkler system had activated, and additional units were dispatched.

There were moderate smoke conditions upon arrival. It was determined that two sprinkler heads had activated in the kitchen area of one of the apartments.

Subsequent investigation determined that a female occupant had put a pan of oil on the electric stove and then left the unit. The oil ignited, and the fire caused two sprinkler heads to open, controlling the fire. Fire damage was limited to the immediate area of the stove, with some water damage in the apartment unit. Damage was estimated to be \$1,500.

Because the fire was controlled by the sprinkler system, it was not necessary to advance any lines into the building.

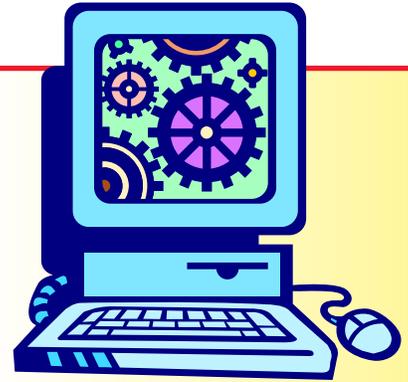
NOTE: Hampshire College was the site of a fire in April 2000 in another apartment-style dormitory. The fire in April occurred in a non-sprinklered building and caused significant damage to the apartment. During the summer, the portion of the building damaged by the fire was equipped with a fire sprinkler system, and the other half of the building will be equipped with one next summer.

**November 15, 2000****Kean University**  
**Union, New Jersey**

A fire in an elevator motor injured six people. The motor caught fire and trapped six people inside the elevator. The police were able to open the elevator and rescue the occupants. All were treated and released.

**November 16, 2000****Lee College**  
**Baytown, TX**

An off-campus house fire claimed the life of a 21-year-old student. The fire occurred in a house where there was no heat because it was being remodeled. The fire started in the back bedroom where the student was sleeping. His body was found in the dining room. There was no evidence of a space heater or smoke detector found.

**Campus Firewatch Website**

The value of this newsletter doesn't stop with just this copy. Visit its companion website at [www.campus-fire-watch.com](http://www.campus-fire-watch.com), where you will find a wealth of information relating to campus fire safety. Included on the site is....

- *Model legislation from Chapel Hill, North Carolina*
- *Lesson plans*
- *Pending federal and state legislation*
- *Testimony given before state legislatures*
- *Breaking news*
- *Fire facts*
- *...and more!*

If you have something that you would like to contribute, please send it to us at [publisher@campus-firewatch.com](mailto:publisher@campus-firewatch.com)  
See you there!

**Seen Elsewhere....****Radford University** Radford, Virginia

"I...would like to apologize to the Radford University students, faculty and staff for the fires on campus. I didn't try or want to harm anybody in any way. I regret what happened, I never wanted to hurt anyone."

This is from a letter written by an arsonist to the community where he admitted setting seven fires. The arsonist was a 20-year old former student who set a string of fires in buildings at Radford University in Radford, Virginia. He is currently out on bail pending a hearing on December 4.

**St. Joseph College** Standish, Maine

A female student charged with arson in connection with a fire that occurred in April 2000 has been found innocent. A Cumberland County Superior Court jury acquitted the woman of all three charges after deliberating for two hours.

The case was built on circumstantial evidence which the prosecutor admitted hampered the case. They have no plans to reopen the investigation.

# Occupant Awareness – Fraternity Fire Safety in State College, PA

By Tim Knisely

The many stories that flash upon my e-mail and that I see in the news demonstrate that there is still a great deal of work to be done towards making college students aware of the dangers from fire. These dangers could be the open stairway that runs from the basement to the third floor, someone carelessly disposing of a cigarette or the inoperable smoke alarms throughout the house. Individually, these and many other hazards can contribute to a fire's severity. However, all of these at once can, and have, proven to be deadly.

From Bloomsburg to Chapel Hill to Seton Hall and many other communities, these tragedies strike when we least expect, often in the early morning hours following a party. Sometimes because someone is careless, and other times because the fire is started maliciously.

The recent fire in Bloomsburg occurred while we were developing an educational program targeted towards the fraternities in State College. The interest in our program was overwhelming because Bloomsburg is only 80 miles away, and a number of people from Bloomsburg University attended the program. Having them present gave a greater sense of reality about the tragedy to the students from Penn State.

Despite this heightened level of awareness and sensitivity, it is still not enough. Everyday we observe serious fire code violations that should be common sense. Don't prop open the door with a sticker affixed that reads "FIRE DOOR, KEEP CLOSED AT ALL TIMES." Don't disable the fire alarm system because it is "too loud." Annual inspections of these properties can only go so far in preventing these

tragedies. How many times do you read of a fatal fire in a house that passed its inspection only one month before. The residents and officers responsible for the house need to be constantly vigilant of the conditions inside.

## Centre Region Code Administration

In State College, Pennsylvania over 40,000 students from Penn State University call this their second home. On-campus dormitories accommodate roughly 13,000 residents while the rest live off-campus or commute. Many of the off-campus residents live within the Centre Region, a regional government boundary that shares resources such as planning, fire protection and code administration. The Centre Region Code Administration provides plan review and inspection to all new construction and conducts fire safety inspections of all residential rental and commercial occupancies. A staff of 18 people, which includes management, inspectors and clerical positions, is entirely funded by permit fees.

Within the jurisdiction of the Code Administration are nearly 16,000 residential rental units, including 52 recognized fraternity houses. This year there are three vacant occupancies, leaving 49 occupied for the fall semester. Many of these houses are large historic properties that were built by the chapters, and some exceed 20,000 square feet of space with over 70 people living in each house. Even though the fraternities make up a small number of the rental properties, they take up nearly 15% of our staff time.

These houses have had inspections

since the early 1980's, and it was not uncommon for an inspection to reveal over 200 violations. Over time, these numbers have continued to decline, with an average of 30 violations per house in 1999. The numbers for 2000 are not completed as of yet, but the average is likely to be around 15 to 17 violations per house.

There are several reasons for this decline. Primarily, educational programs were developed to help make the fraternity officers aware of the hazards, teach them how to make the house safer and making those in charge responsible for fire safety in their houses.

## Educational Programs

Beginning in 1997 a program was developed to train the house managers in fire prevention. The first program was nothing more than a lecture to a dozen participants followed by a question and answer session. This program now opens with a meal that provides everyone a chance to socialize with the inspectors and firefighters. Ironically, at the start of this year's program a two-alarm fire occurred in a mid-rise student apartment building in town.

In February of this year the ACACIA Fraternity at Penn State began developing a fire safety program for all new members of the Greek system. ACACIA, along with the Masonic Lodge of Pennsylvania provided the funding. The Grand Master, Robert Dlugie, Jr. who is an assistant fire chief in Elysburg, opened the program. His ties to the fire service and his town's proximity to Bloomsburg give him first hand experience with the task. Speakers at this program included Ed Comeau, the

Continued from page 12

publisher of Campus Firewatch; Bonnie Woodruff, the mother of one of the Chapel Hill fire victims; and this author. Over 350 students, alumni and officials from local universities attended. This program was so successful that the Mason's are conducting similar programs on campuses throughout Pennsylvania.

The first Annual Student Fire Safety Expo and "Great Escape" highlighted this year's Fire Prevention Week. The Expo was held outside of the ACACIA house in a large tent where local fire equipment vendors and government officials had displays. Of most interest were two sprinkler demonstration trailers that were provided by local contractors. Inside the ACACIA house was the "Great Escape" where the fire department had a large party room filled with smoke. Participants first had to view the fire escape plan for the room and then find their way through the blinding smoke to exit the building. Local restaurants and the State College Masonic Lodge provided the food and refreshments.

### **Inspection Process**

All fraternity houses are inspected during the fall semester, with two fire inspectors assigned to this program to maintain consistency between inspections. Any violations observed are immediately presented in writing to the house manager. Any life safety violations that require immediate attention are listed separately for action, while other violations are checked in 30 days for compliance. If the repairs are not completed during the reinspection, and an action plan has not been developed, a reinspection fee and/or summary citation are issued. Reinspections continue every 30 days until compliance is achieved with additional fines as needed.

### **Partnerships**

One of the keys to success in fire prevention is the partnership with other groups and agencies. This partnership in State College includes the Inter-Fraternity Council (IFC), Greek Life, the Fraternity Purchasing Association (FPA-a non-profit purchasing co-op), the Alpha Fire Company, State College Borough Health Department, and other government and public service organizations.

We teach the importance of partnerships to the house managers and officers as well. We let them know who to call for help before it's too late. By having the houses team up with the fire protection companies, maintenance contractors, FPA as well as the fire inspectors we are able to provide them with resources to help make the house fire safe year-round.

One of our partners in fire safety is Penn State University's Environmental Health & Safety staff. The University has jurisdiction over all campus buildings and provides their own inspections and educational programs. The Centre Region staff is presently working with Penn State to develop a transition program that prepares on-campus students to move off-campus, where many are "on their own" for the first time.

### **Pre-Planning**

During the 1999 inspection cycle, a fire department pre-plan was developed jointly by the fire chief and fire inspection staff. This plan provides the fire department with vital details about the building that otherwise may not be available. This could be critical information to have readily available at 3:00 AM on a Saturday, for example. Information such as structural details, door access codes, specific fire or life

hazards, alarm or sprinkler information and emergency contacts are provided. This information is updated during the annual inspection and other times as needed.

### **Sprinkler Legislation**

Knowing that the only true way to provide complete fire protection in these houses is with automatic sprinkler systems, our staff has been actively supporting legislation that would mandate sprinklers in fraternities and sororities. House Bill 2458, (HB-2458) passed the Pennsylvania House by a 190-1 vote on October 11, 2000 and now moves to the Senate. This bill is similar to one recently passed in New Jersey following the Seton Hall fire.

### **Summary**

With all of these programs and improvements, there is still a severe life hazard in the fraternity setting. Even when the buildings are protected, our work is not complete. Fire protection maintenance programs need to be enforced, prevention measures still need to be practiced, and every year you must start again with the incoming class. As stated by a local fire safety partner, "our goal is to protect students from students."

*Tim Knisely is the Senior Fire and Housing Inspector for the Centre Region Code Administration, State College, PA. He can be reached by email at [tekrcog@vicon.net](mailto:tekrcog@vicon.net).*