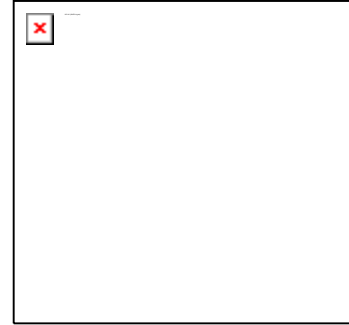


EDITORIAL

Residence Hall Fires in the U.S. WAKE UP CALLS TO REALITY?



Does it seem like since the fire at the Seton Hall University Residence Hall we seem to be hearing more and more about residence hall fires? Sure does to me! Of course this is typical of media hype as we have come to call it. Three students die in the fire, and it is national news, and then every fire in a residence hall is reported as a major issue for a few days, and then it is a forgotten issue until another like occurrence. The reality of fires in Residence Halls, Fraternity Houses and Sorority Houses continues----it just doesn't make national news it seems unless there is a death. Since the Seton Hall fire on January 19, 2000, that I am aware of due to news releases, there have been fires in halls at Heidelberg College in Ohio, at the University of New Mexico, and just this last weekend at the University of Nebraska at Kearney. Then of course, there are those fires that are put out by extinguishers that are never reported outside of the university setting. They are usually trash can type fires caught early on. Residence hall fires start from a variety of sources such as open flames associated with candles, or incense, or smoking, from electrical source overloads, from electrical sources such as hotplates, clothes irons, curling irons, and inattention to cooking. Nearly all are avoidable, but then as the old saying goes, "hindsight is 20/20". The big question is how do we stop fires in residence halls? Here at Creighton, we do fire drills which test not only the evacuation procedures for hall occupants, but also the functioning of the alarm system, system electronic reporting to Public Safety, Public Safety Officer Response, and Residence Hall Directors (RD's) and Assistants (RA's) functions. We do fire safety training for RD's and RA's which incorporate statistics and FEMA provided state of the art videos. We provide fire extinguisher training and live fire extinguishment upon request. As renovation and new construction occurs, Life Safety Codes and Building Codes demand installation of sprinkler systems and ADA alarms with strobes for the hearing impaired. IS IT ENOUGH? I wish I had an answer for that question. In spite of what we do and have done, we had a fire last fall at Gallagher Hall. At best, no one died--possibly because of the time it occurred, and the fact that the alarm systems functioned properly. At worst, dozens of students were forced to evacuate and had their schedules and lifestyle upset for a period of time. Two of our Public Safety officers suffered smoke inhalation and one required hospital treatment. Damage costs estimates to the building exceed \$70,000.00 and all the bills are not yet tabulated. Recent FEMA documentaries state that cost of sprinkler installation in a residence hall equates closely to the cost of carpet installation in the same facility. Sprinklers at Seton Hall would have probably saved the lives of the three students. Priorities always seem to equate to dollars.

We can only hope that what we do is enough to prevent another Seton Hall.

The EH & S Newsletter is published by the Creighton University Environmental Health and Safety Department. It is provided to disseminate safety information to Creighton University Employees and Students inclusive of regulatory updates and policy changes. Questions regarding newsletter content and suggestions for ways to improve the newsletter should be addressed to Paul Nichols, Director, Environmental Health and Safety at pnichols@creighton.edu. We welcome any and all constructive criticism via e-mail, fax 402.546.6403 or phone at 402.546.6400.

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