



Official: Campus Fire Safety Often Overlooked

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Seven college students were killed in off-campus housing fires during the last academic year.

As parents and college students lug the furnishings into off-campus homes and apartments over the next few weeks, fire safety is probably not on their list of priorities.

But, it should be, said Ed Comeau, publisher of Campus Firewatch.

“I encourage parents to take the time to really check out where their kids will be living. I don’t expect students are thinking about codes and safety. They’re more interested about getting their own room and how far the place is from campus,” he said.

The majority of houses rented to students don’t have sprinklers or another way out from an upper floor.

During the last academic year, seven students were killed in fires in off-campus housing.

The deaths of two University of Cincinnati students in an off-campus blaze on Jan. 1, 2013 sparked the city to establish a website listing housing that has passed inspections.

The website (<http://cagismaps.hamilton-co.org/cincinnatiServices/cincinnatiSafeStudentHousing>) is dedicated to four college students who died in off-campus house fires.

Comeau said he’s pleased that Cincinnati officials and others realize they can make a difference.

“Some colleges and universities are holding RA (resident assistant) academies where they learn to use a fire extinguisher and things they can do to prevent fires,” he added.

There’s a ton of information about campus fire safety available, and free. And, some fire departments in college towns visit students as they get settled in.

Comeau has turned to social media to spread the message, and offer tips. His Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/CampusFirewatch>) page is chocked full of information, and his daily tweets offer tips to keep students safe.

But, he was quick to add that some colleges and towns that have experienced student deaths aren’t changing the way they do business. They’ve turned their heads.

“It’s unfortunate that they all haven’t taken a pro-active approach,” he said.

Comeau described one blaze last year that claimed the life of a woman who became trapped in her attic room. “There was no way out. Firefighters couldn’t get to her in time...”

While the causes of off-campus fires run the gamut, careless smoking and improper disposal of cigarettes are among the top.

“If you look at a lot of off-campus houses, you often see furniture on the porch. The kids think that’s the perfect place to smoke. Then, the couch catches on fire and spreads because it has a head start.”

To draw attention to the importance of the issue, September has been designated Campus Fire Safety Month. To date, the governors of 17 states have signed proclamations (<http://www.campus-firewatch.com/resources/campus-fire-safety-month-proclamations/>).

The USFA (<http://www.usfa.fema.gov/citizens/college/>) also promotes campus fire safety tips.

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