

CAMPUS Firewatch™

JANUARY 2001

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Fatal Fires, 2000

Campus fires became an important issue in 2000. From South Orange, New Jersey to Berkeley, California, the deaths of young, promising students galvanized people into making efforts to try to avoid these tragedies. What did we learn, and what was done in the year 2000?

This month we are going to focus on the fatal incidents that involved students from higher education and what changes they brought about. In an upcoming issue we will provide a profile on the non-fatal incidents.

Campus Firewatch was able to identify 9 incidents related to college or university housing that killed 15 people. These fires were identified through media searches and are not intended to be a complete compilation of all of the incidents that have occurred. The criteria for being included in this list is that the fire occurred in an occupancy that was either owned by an institution, was a Greek occupancy, or was being rented and occupied by students. All of the fatalities, except for two, were students.

Alcohol on Campus

Ed Comeau, writer-tech.com

Alcohol consumption has long been connected with college campuses. While the recent trend is towards educating students in more responsible behavior, the problem still exists. The connection between alcohol consumption, student behavior and the incidence of fires in student housing, both on- and off-campus is a serious concern.

What is the prevalence of alcohol on campus? This is something that is difficult to quantify. However, there are some indicators and surveys that can provide us with information in this area. When reviewing this information, it is important to remember that the drinking age in all states, nationwide, is 21.

Under federal law, colleges and universities are required to annually report crime statistics to the United States Department of Education. Among these statistics, they are required to report the number of alcohol-related arrests.

According to the June 9, 2000 issue of The Chronicle of Higher Education, in a review of 481 campuses with over 5,000 students, arrests for liquor law violations increased to 23,261 in 1998 from 18,708 in 1997, a 24% increase. However, increased policing and enforcement may attribute to this increase.

The Harvard School of Public Health has been measuring alcohol usage on campuses since 1993. The 1999 study had responses from over 14,000 students at 139 institutions across the country and it focused on what has been classified as binge drinking, which is defined as con-

suming five drinks in a row for men and four drinks for women.

According to the survey, there is an increasing polarization occurring on campus between the number of drinkers and abstainers. The number of frequent binge drinkers, which is someone who binge drinks three or more times within a two week period, increased from 23% in 1993 to 28% in 1999. At the same time, the number of people abstaining from alcohol increased from 15% to 19% over the same period.

When looking at the responses, 81% of the respondents reported drinking, with 44% classifying themselves as either an occasional or frequent binge drinker.

College Student Patterns of Alcohol Use (1999)

Abstainer.....	19%
Nonbinge drinker.....	37%
Occasional binge drinker.....	21%
Frequent binge drinker	23%

Drinking style of students who consume alcohol (1999)

Drank on 10 or more occasions in the past 30 days	22%
Usually binges when drinks.....	45%
Was drunk three or more times in the past month	29%
Drinks to get drunk	47%

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FROM THE Editor

The year has started on a positive note and a tragic one.

Two fires in January have killed two students in off-campus housing. Another fire broke out in a house where the fraternity brothers were lighting toilet paper and then putting under the doors of their roommate's bedrooms. Candles started fires in a fraternity at State College, Pennsylvania and a dormitory in South Hadley, Massachusetts and a faculty member's office in Los Angeles.

On the other hand, Representative McGeehan reintroduced his sprinkler legislation in Pennsylvania. Senator Edwards is reportedly going to reintroduce his sprinkler bill in the 107th Congress. Both are laudable efforts that, if enacted, would significantly help to improve fire safety on campuses across the nation.

This is the time for action. We have to keep the level of awareness up among our legislators to ensure that they are aware of the importance of campus fire safety. Without their constituents continually "knocking at their doors," reminding them of the need for not only sprinklers, but also increased fire prevention training and education, it is an issue that will fall by the wayside until the next tragedy occurs. Find out who your representatives are and let them know how you feel about campus fire safety.

This brings up the issue of fire prevention. In all of the legislation that was proposed last year, none of them mandated fire prevention education and training of the staff and the students. This is, in my opinion, one of the most effective measures that we can take to reducing the incidence of fires. Unquestionably, sprinklers and smoke detectors play critical and valuable roles. However, fire prevention education is as equally important, but it is falling by the wayside and not receiving the national focus that it should.

As a nation, we are focusing on the younger children. Stop, drop and roll, crawl low in smoke and Sparky the Dog are all part of established Fire Prevention Week programs. But what about the other 51 weeks of the year? And, more importantly, what happens once they get into junior high or high school? Often, the education and training does not continue.

As these students move on to college, we have a unique opportunity to reintroduce them to fire safety in their freshman and sophomore years while many of them are living in the dormitories. If we are aggressive in "hammering home" the message during this time, then, when they move off campus in their latter years, they will remember these messages.

In our opinion, off-campus housing is where the problem lies. According to statistics from the U.S. Department of Education prepared for Campus Firewatch, approximately 62% of the students in four-year institutions live off-campus. That translates to 3.4 million students living in houses, apartments, fraternities and sororities. Two people are dead already this year. Let's make a change.

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.

CAMPUS JANUARY 2001 Firewatch™

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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.

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Fatal Fires - continued from page 1

2000 FATAL FIRES

January 19, 2000

Seton Hall University

Fatalities: 3

**Injuries: 54 students,
2 fire fighters, 2 police officers**

An early morning fire in a common area that was deliberately started killed three freshmen. Frank Caltabiolta, John Giunta and Aaron Karol, all 18 years old, died in this fire. Prior to this fire it was reported that there had been a number of false alarms in this dormitory.

March 19, 2000

Bloomsburg University

Fatalities: 3

This fire in the Tau Kappa Epsilon fraternity house killed Kirstoffer Polhemus (senior), Marchus LaBuda, 22 (junior) and Cliff Vail, 21 (junior).

April 20, 2000

**Massachusetts Institute of
Technology**

Fatalities: 1

A student killed herself in her dormitory room by "self-inflicted thermal burns," according to her death certificate. She died four days after the fire.

June 8, 2000

Millikin University

Fatalities: 1

A fire that started in an upholstered chair in a common area killed one male student in an off-campus fraternity.

August 20, 2000

University of California, Berkeley

Fatalities: 3

A 21-year old senior, Azalea Jusay, and her two parents, Florita and Francisco

Jusay, were killed in an off-campus house fire that was started by combustibles being placed too close to a furnace. Another occupant in the house had to jump from a second story window to escape the fire.

September 29, 2000

University of Pittsburgh

Fatalities: 1

Joseph Marcinek, a 21-year old senior was killed in an arson fire. The fire was started in an apartment on the second floor by a former boyfriend of the occupant, who was not home at the time of the fire.

November 16, 2000

Lee College

Fatalities: 1

Jose "Danny" Ramirez, 21, died in an off-campus house fire. The fire started in the back bedroom where the student was sleeping. The house was being renovated at the time of the fire and was did not have any heat. There was no evidence of a smoke detector found.

November 22, 2000

New York University

Fatalities: 1

Helen Carnegie, 25, a graduate student at New York University, died in a fire that was started when three candles at the foot of her bed ignited her bedding.

December 10, 2000

University of Dayton

Fatalities: 1

Austin Cohen, 21, a senior, was killed in a fire that was determined to be arson. The fire occurred in a house owned by the University of Dayton, and was allegedly started by one Cohen's housemates. The fire alarm was disabled at the time of the fire.

What have we learned from these fires and these deaths? What change has come about?

LEGISLATION

In the case of Seton Hall, where a fire that was determined to have been started by an open flame killed three freshmen, there has been a significant change in New Jersey. Within less than six months of the fire the state legislature and the Governor enacted sweeping legislation that will require the installation of sprinkler systems in all dormitories and Greek housing, statewide. To back this up they also are providing a fund of \$50 million that institutions can draw on in the form of low- or no-interest loans. This type of legislation is unprecedented.

On the heels of the triple-fatality in Bloomsburg, state Representative McGeehan in Pennsylvania introduced legislation to require the installation of sprinklers in dormitories in that state. Following a series of hearings, this legislation passed through the House of Representatives with only one dissenting vote and moved into the state Senate. Unfortunately, it died in committee without any further action being taken on it.

However, as we are going to press, Representative McGeehan is reintroducing this legislation (see related article in this issue).

At the federal level, there were a number of bills introduced. Senator John Edwards (D-NC) introduced Senate Bill 2100 which would have required sprinklers in all dormitories and Greek housing, nationwide. This bill also died in committee without any hearings being held.

Other bills were introduced in Congress. With one exception, HR 4504, Higher Education Technical Amendments of 2000, none of them made it out of either the House or Senate. HR4504, did pass the House, but died in committee in the Senate.

However, there are other steps that can be taken other than legislation in an effort to make change.

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Networking

In November 2000, the National Fire Protection Association, the United States Fire Administration and the Campus Safety, Health and Environmental Managers Association co-sponsored the Campus Fire Safety Forum II. This was a gathering of fire safety professionals from across the country that are involved in providing fire protection at campuses and campus communities across the country. Forum II served as an excellent opportunity to open the dialogue between people and organizations that previously did not have a formal network in place to start exchanging information.

Several listservs focusing on campus fire safety were started too. One is located on the Campus Firewatch website, and another is run by Randy Hormann from Miami University in Oxford, Ohio. Both of these listservs provide a mechanism for people to post questions and to learn what is happening in campus fire safety across the nation.

Publications

Because of the need for a central focus on campus fire safety, Campus Firewatch was launched in May 2000. This grew out of the need expressed in the first Campus Fire Safety Forum that someone needed to take a leadership role in the issues of campus fire safety.

The National Association of State Fire Marshals is updating their CD-ROM that focuses on campus fire safety. Called "Meeting of the Minds," it was issued several years ago in the wake of the Chapel Hill fraternity fire that killed five students. The updated CD will have more current information as well as take advantage of the resources that are available on the Internet.

The NFPA is adding a new chapter to the upcoming 19th edition of the Fire Protection Handbook that will focus on campus fire safety. This chapter will provide a central resource for people to reference when developing fire safety programs at their institutions.

Institutions

Seton Hall University sprinklered all of its buildings and also instituted an aggressive training and education program among the students and staff. The benefit of the sprinkler program was shown when sprinklers extinguished a wastebasket fire in Boland Hall, the site of the January fatal fire. However, there is still more to be done with the "human element" as was shown during a Halloween decorating contest. The contest had to be stopped when South Orange fire officials found a hall littered with combustible material, including hay.

While the legislation in Pennsylvania may not have passed, others in the state were taking proactive steps to help avoid a similar fatal fire such as occurred in Bloomsburg. The governors from the State System of Higher Education voted to install sprinklers in dormitories at all of the 14 institutions that make up the system.

Other institutions in New Jersey also "ramped up" their fire protection programs, such as Rowan University that also launched an aggressive sprinkler program in its residence halls.

In the Greek system, the Kappa Alpha Theta sorority has initiated a campaign to sprinkler all of its properties, nationwide (see related article in the December issue of Campus Firewatch).

Awareness

One of the end results of these unfortunate tragedies is a heightened level of awareness regarding the issues of campus fire safety. While fire safety has always been a concern at colleges and universities, it is now becoming one which others are more knowledgeable about, including parents. It has been reported that parents are starting to ask more probing questions during orientation and campus tours about the level of fire safety at the institution's residence halls.

The College Parents of America joined with the USFA to promote fire safety among its membership and others. It also supported the legislation put forward by Senator Edwards.

Where do we go from here?

In the first few weeks of 2001 we have already seen 2 students die in fires. While there is legislation being proposed at the state and federal levels, the change that is needed is probably going to be market-driven and not by legislation.

Colleges and universities are going to realize that the issue of fire safety in residence halls is one that the parents are concerned about and that the institutions had better come to grips with it. As it becomes more and more competitive to attract students, the issue of the level of fire safety, along with athletics and academic stature might be a factor in the parents and students decision-making process.

Breakdown of Fatalities

Fatalities: 15 deaths total

Males11
Females:4

Location of Fatalities

Residence Hall.....4
Fraternities4
Off-Campus House5
Off-Campus Apartment1
On-Campus House1

Cause of Fires (incidents)

Arson.....4
Unknown.....3
Accidental2
Candle.....1

Alcohol on Campus - continued from page 1

Another study in New York State found that 40% of the students had drunk alcohol once a week or more during the past year.

As might be expected, fewer underage students drink (63%) than those who are of-age (74%), and on fewer occasions. However, the underage students drink more alcohol on each occasion.

Have drunk within the past 30 days

Underage63%
Of-age.....74%

Usually consume five or more drinks at each occasion

Underage42%
Of-age.....27%

According to a 1999 report by the Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC), the prevalence of binge drinking is higher among Greek residents.

Students who participate in binge drinking

Greek Residents
Men86%
Women80%

Non-Greek Residents
Men45%
Women35%

Greeks who became binge drinkers in college
Men78%
Women76%

Non-Greeks who became binge drinkers in college
Men32%
Women25%

The number of students that are abstaining in drinking and binge drinkers is increasing, while the number of nonbinge and occasional drinkers is decreasing, resulting in a polarization of drinking behavior on campus. While there may be fewer students drinking, those that are, are drinking with more intensity.



The living room table in an off-campus house after the fire.

Alcohol as a factor in fires

While we have not been able to establish a direct correlation between the consumption of alcohol on campus and the incidence of fires, there are some assumptions that can be made.

In the 1996 fire in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, that killed five students, four of them had blood alcohol levels of over 0.14. This fire broke out following a party the evening before, as had the fire in Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania where three males were killed. At a fire in an off-campus house in Burlington, Vermont, that injured three residents, one seriously. Fire officials found evidence of alcohol in the area where the fire had started. A recent fire at a fraternity in Austin, Texas that caused \$1.5 million in damage occurred during a party in the basement.

In the report *Alcohol and Health* published by the US Department of Health and Human Services, it was reported that "Approximately one-half of the adults who die in house fires have high BAC (blood alcohol count) values, a finding that is

consistent with the disproportionate number of deaths that occur in house fires on weekends, when people tend to consume more alcohol."

The report goes on, "Alcohol may contribute to burns and fires by causing drowsiness and increasing the likelihood of falling asleep while smoking. In addition, intoxication may reduce awareness of smoke and fire alarms and may interfere with escape from a burning building by increasing disorientation associated with smoke and panic."

In addition to causing fires, there is evidence indicating that the survival rate for people with higher blood alcohol levels is lower than those with lower blood alcohol levels. The Alcohol and Health study reported that, "alcoholic burn victims had a mortality rate three times that of nonalcoholic burn victims and also died of smaller burns (measured as a percentage of total body surface area)."

The effect of alcohol upon the human body is well known. As a central nervous

Alcohol on Campus - continued from page 1

system depressant, it has the ability to significantly impact upon a person's judgment and their ability to physically respond to a perceived threat.

According to the report *Establishing a Relationship Between Alcohol and Casualties of Fire* published by the USFA, there are several factors in drinking that play a role in the increased incidence of fire fatalities. These include:

- Reduced ability to detect a fire
- Reduced ability to respond to a fire or fire alarm
- Reduced ability to safely escape from a fire

These impairments can be the result of impaired motor coordination and mental clarity due to the effects of alcohol upon the body.

When looking at the pattern for fire fatalities, nationwide, the risk drops after the age five and does not markedly increase until the age of 65. However, according to the USFA report, the trend for alcohol-related fatalities is between the ages of 18 to 40, which is the opposite of the national pattern.

There is also a probable connection between smoking and drinking. Minnesota has been conducting autopsies on all fire fatalities. In the period from 1993 to 1996 there were 255 deaths caused by fire. Out of these, 30% were found to have positive blood alcohol concentrations. The leading cause of death among this group was smoking materials, which represented 64%, versus the non-alcohol impaired group which had only 37% of the deaths caused by smoking.

Drinking on campus is prevalent. However, there are concerted efforts underway to curb this behavior. In a future issue of *Campus Firewatch* we will cover what is being done to help reduce the number of students that are drinking and the risky behavior that is associated with alcohol consumption.

The information used for this article is online in the RESOURCE section of Campus Firewatch.

2000 Campus Firewatch Article Index

In the year 2000, *Campus Firewatch* was launched with the objective of providing the type of information that the campus fire safety professional could use. Over the course of the first eight issues we covered a wide range of material, ranging from arson to power strips, as well as regular columns such as *Legislation Update* and the acclaimed *Campus Fire Log*.

As a reference, we have compiled a list of the articles that appeared in the year 2000.

20 Questions to Answer Before You Sign a Rental Agreement	June
ACAP Hosts College Fire Safety Seminar	October
America Burning Recommissioned	June
Arson on Campus	September
Bloomsburg Pennsylvania, Aftermath	July and August
Campus Fire Safety Forum II	November and December
Candle and Halogen Lamp Survey Results	August
Candle Industry Facts	November
Fire Protection Improving	September
Fraternity Chapter Distribution	October
Fraternity Fire Safety in State College, PA	November
Fraternity Fires-A study in contrasts	August
Fraternity Moves Into New House	October
Fraternity Pleads Guilty to Fire Violations	October
Great Escape on Campus	September
Hotel/Motel Fire Safety Act	June
IAFC University and College Fire Chief's Forum	September
Insurance Reductions	August
Life Safety in Dormitories, NFPA Questions and Answers	October
New Jersey Coalition for Safe Student Housing	July
New York Governor's Task Force on Campus Fire Safety	December
NFPA Fire Protection Handbook ñ Campus Fire Safety Chapter	November
Off Campus...Out of Sight, Out of Mind?	October
Pennsylvania Sprinkler Legislation	August
Power strips ñ What is the Story?	December
Seton Hall, a Follow-up	September
Seton Hall, Halloween at	November
Seton Hall, OSHA Citations	September
Statistical Summary	June
Teachable Moment	May
University of Alaska	July
USFA/NFPA College Fire Safety Forum I	May
Working Together-Town/Gown	June
Year in Review	December

LEGISLATION Update

Unfortunately, with the exception of New Jersey and Wisconsin, all of the legislation introduced last year at both the federal and state levels did not get enacted.

According to a spokesperson for Senator John Edwards (D-NJ) office, he does plan to reintroduce his legislation. However, it was unknown when this would occur, or if there would be any changes made in the new bill.

Pennsylvania State Representative Michael McGeehan (D-Philadelphia) reintroduced legislation on January 23 calling for the installation of sprinklers in residence halls and Greek occupancies in the state. As soon as it is available, this piece of legislation will be posted on the Campus Firewatch website.

Campus Firewatch spoke with several people about the past year, and what might be expected in the upcoming legislative sessions.

"It is rare for legislation to make it through Congress in the first year," says Sara Yerkes, director of governmental affairs for the National Fire Protection Association. "Many times it takes two or three efforts before a bill is passed." An example of this, according to Carrye Brown, administrator for the U.S. Fire Administration, was the Hotel/Motel Fire Safety Act, which took three attempts before it became law.

"We made a mistake in the last session of not personalizing the issue," says McGeehan. "When you put a human face on it, it has much more of an impact." When asked what his strategy was for this session, McGeehan replied, "We are going to take a more aggressive stance. We are going to make it untenable for those that oppose it."

"It is time to translate rhetoric into reality," said John Viniello, president of the National Fire Sprinkler Association. "The problem is that time works on the side of the politician that doesn't want to be in the forefront of proactive legislation for life safety. Only when you have a tragedy are fingers pointed and there is a cry for action."

Seen Elsewhere....

University of Colorado Boulder, Colorado

According to news stories, there were 29 arson fires in 1999, which was the highest in five years and a sharp increase over the average 18 fires reported each year.

Campus Firewatch provided material for a number of stories that appeared on the one-year anniversary of Seton Hall. Stories on the Associated Press newswire, the Bergen Record and the New Jersey Star Ledger either contained information from Campus Firewatch or included interviews with the Campus Firewatch publisher, Ed Comeau.



Campus Firewatch Website

The value of this newsletter doesn't stop with just this copy. Visit its companion website at www.campus-firewatch.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

See you there!

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.

January 1, 2001 Off-Campus Fatal Fire

West Virginia University Morgantown, West Virginia

The following information was obtained in an interview by Campus Firewatch with fire officials.

A fire in an off-campus house has killed one student and left another man critically injured.

The fire occurred in an off-campus house that had been converted into apartment units. There were three people living in the building, but one was not home at the time of the fire.

There were two smoke detectors in the building. One was operational, but the smoke detector on the second floor, where the fatality was found, did not have a battery. The person that was critically injured was awakened by the operation of the smoke detector on the first floor.

The fire department responded to the fire at 8:31 a.m. As soon as the first engine was pulling out of the station they could see heavy smoke and upgraded the response.

Upon arrival the fire fighters attempted to rescue the trapped victim on the second floor. However, due to the heavy fire involvement they were not able to make access.

The cause of the fire has been determined to be electrical.

According to fire officials, they have been having a serious problem with student-related fire activity. In 2000 there were over 100 street fires set in the Sunnyside section of Morgantown, which is notorious for partying. Several of these fires have escalated into bonfires and into structure fires.

The university has become involved in helping to curb this behavior. According to fire officials if a student is convicted of setting a fire they will be expelled. As a result of this and other efforts, the number of fires has been curbed.

January 12, 2001 Fraternity Fire

Penn State State College, PA

The following information was provided by Tim Knisely, Centre Region Code Administration

This morning, at approximately 1:15 a.m., a fire was reported at the Tau Phi Delta Fraternity. The fire was extinguished by occupants using a dry chemical fire extinguisher. Damage was contained to one bedroom, with smoke damage throughout the floor.

Cause was an unattended candle on a dresser. One occupant was hospitalized for smoke inhalation.

The structure is a 3-story building of ordinary construction. There is a fire alarm and automatic fire detection system and single station smoke detectors in every bedroom. There were no sprinklers.

January 15, 2001 Fraternity Fire

Kansas University Lawrence, Kansas

The following information was provided by Fire Marshal Barr.

No one was injured in a fire early Monday in a room at the Phi Delta Theta fraternity house, 1621 Edgehill Rd.

The fire activated a sprinkler system and was extinguished by the time Lawrence-Douglas County Fire & Medical units arrived, according to Battalion Chief Bill Stark.

Damage was listed at \$600.00.

The cause of the fire is still under investigation. However, it appears that the equipment involved was a portable fan that came in contact with a curtain, causing the fan to overheat. The fraternity was evacuated for a short period. It was unclear as to how many residents may have been at the house.

Mary Remus, director of the house, said the residence was built in 1989 and has always had sprinklers.

January 15, 2001 Laboratory Fire

Texas Tech Lubbock, Texas

A student's chemical experiment caused a fire in a chemistry building. The student

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Campus Fire Log - continued from page 8

observed liquids from the experiment catch fire and attempted to extinguish it with a fire extinguisher. He was unable to extinguish it and left to get a larger one. Upon his return the fire had grown too large, and he yelled for assistance. An assistant professor responded, closed the doors and notified the fire department.

The building is unsprinklered.

January 16, 2001 **Student Accommodations**

St. Martins

Lancaster, UK

A fire started when a pan was left unattended on a cooker ignited. An 18-year old female was taken to the hospital for smoke inhalation. Twenty students were evacuated from student accommodations.

January 16, 2001 **Off-Campus House Fire**

University of California, Berkeley **Berkeley, California**

Update. A lawsuit has been filed against the landlord of a house where a student and her parents were killed in a fire in August, 2000. The sole surviving family member has filed the suit, claiming that the furnace that caused the fire was not maintained and was malfunctioning, there were no smoke detectors and that the windows on the second floor, where the victims were found, were inoperable.

The fire was determined to have been started when a box left on top of the dining room furnace was ignited. The fire department was unable to find any evidence of smoke detectors in the building. The windows on the second floor were alleged to have been painted shut and inoperable.

A fourth occupant in the building was able to jump from a second-story window.

January 16, 2001

University of Michigan **Ann Arbor, Michigan**

The following information was provided by Robert Patrick.

Fire at South Quad Residence Hall at University of Michigan. A smoke detector activated the building fire alarm system around 1:30. A check of the building located smoke coming from the elevator mechanical room above the 9th floor of the building. Ann Arbor Fire Department extinguished the fire. The building was evacuated during the fire but residents were allowed to reenter shortly after the fire was extinguished. No injuries. Damage confined to elevator motor. Damage estimate unknown at this time.

January 19, 2001 **Dormitory Fire**

Mount Holyoke College **South Hadley, MA**

The following information was obtained in interviews by Campus Firewatch with fire and college officials.

A dormitory room was damaged in a late afternoon fire. The building fire alarm was activated, and the fire department was notified at 4:57 p.m. The fire was contained to the room of origin, but residents of the floor were relocated to another dormitory. An investigation determined that the fire was caused by a candle left unattended on top of a television set. The residents had left the room ten minutes before the building fire alarm system was activated.

The building is a four story residence hall built of non-combustible construction. It is equipped with smoke detectors only in the hallways, not in the individual rooms. There are no sprinklers.

Candles are not permitted in the residence halls according to college officials.

January 19, 2001 **Off-Campus Fatal House Fire**

University of Georgia Law School **Athens, GA**

A fire in an off-campus house killed a 24 year old woman. Authorities have determined that she was murdered, and are treating the incident as arson.

January 21, 2001 **University Office Fire**

University of Southern California **Los Angeles, CA**

The following information was provided by William Murphy, USC.

A fire caused by an attended candle ignited nearby combustibles in a faculty member's office. The damage was limited to the office and mostly to contents. A building occupant smelled the smoke and telephoned the university police department. The building is not sprinklered.

January 21, 2001 **Off-Campus House Fire**

Colorado State University **Fort Collins, CO**

The following information was provided by Tom DeMint, Poudre Fire Authority

The Poudre Fire Authority responded to a house fire near Colorado State University. The structure was a Type V wood frame single family home that had been rented to 5 students and 1 college aged non-student. The students were all male and belong to a fraternity that does not have sufficient room to house all its members.

The occupants were alerted to the fire by a working single station smoke detector in this unprotected structure.

The fire's origin has been determined to be in one of the student's bedroom. There were no injuries. The fire was caused when the six residents were playing a game of lighting tissue paper on fire and throwing it under the bedroom doors. The occupant would then get up and stomp out the fire.

This was done to one occupant's room, and he thought he had stomped out the fire before leaving. The fire ignited his mattress, which the other occupants of the house attempted to remove the mattress, but were unable to do so. Conditions worsened and the room flashed over, extending out an exterior window and into the hallway and adjoining bedrooms.

Criminal damages are pending.

Breaking News on Pennsylvania

As we are going to press, there is a great deal of activity occurring in Pennsylvania.

In the 2000 legislative session, Representative Michael McGeehan (D-Philadelphia) introduced legislation that would have called for the retrofitting of sprinklers in residence halls and Greek housing. After a series of hearings, the legislation passed the House by a vote of 190 to 1. It then moved to the Senate, where no action was taken on it and it died in committee.

On Tuesday, January 23, Representative McGeehan reintroduced his legislation. Along with a bi-partisan support of 69 cosponsors, House Bill 209 will provide a five-year window to colleges, universities and recognized Greek houses to install sprinkler systems. This would be done through a \$125 million low-interest loan program.

At the press conference, and a rally that immediately followed, a number of people spoke in support of the legislation. Among them was Jamie Dezzi, who survived the tragic fraternity fire that killed three Bloomsburg University students in March 2000. Along with Dezzi were other legislators and sprinkler industry representatives.

"We have been shown the way by New Jersey," said McGeehan in an interview with Campus Firewatch. "This isn't going to be a slam-dunk, and we don't want to rush it through. We want to do the responsible thing and make sure everyone has an opportunity to think it through," he continued. It is also important to make sure that the funding is available to all of the institutions in the state, large and small. "No matter where you go, each and every student is protected equally."

Along with the legislation, the long-awaited report commissioned by the state Senate was released on Wednesday,

January 24. This report, entitled "The Report of Retrofitting Fire Sprinklers into Pennsylvania Facilities," looked at residence halls and Greek housing, among other occupancies.

In reviewing the report, the following emerged (a more detailed review will appear in an upcoming issue of Campus Firewatch):

There are approximately 1,250 dormitories in Pennsylvania, of which 88% are unsprinklered.

The cost to sprinkler these buildings would range from \$141 million to \$328 million, with a "best estimate" of \$215 million

There are approximately 900 Greek occupancies, of which 68% are unsprinklered. The cost to sprinkler these occupancies ranges from \$21 million to \$40 million.

Over the past two decades, there has been a 50% decrease in the number of fire deaths in Pennsylvania. "The bottom line is that there is some reason to be optimistic that the downward trend will continue..." says Phil Durgin, the executive director of the Legislative Budget and Finance Committee who oversaw the production of the report. He went on to list some of the reasons for the downward trend. "The implementation of the Hotel/Motel Fire Safety Act that required federal employees to stay in sprinklered hotels spurred hotel chains to sprinkler their properties. Pennsylvania also passed an act in 1984 that required sprinklers in most new high-rise and renovated high-rise, which was another factor that helped to reduced deaths. Another thing is that in 1999 Pennsylvania adopted a state-wide building code." Before this date, there was no statewide building code.

While there may be a downward trend in fires, Pennsylvania has been the site of some of the more recent tragic fires.

In 1994 and 2000, fraternity fires killed eight students in Pennsylvania. This represents 1/3 of all of the deaths in Greek housing, nationwide, since 1990.

Harveys Lake was the site of a board and care fire that killed 10 people in 1997, which is one of the greatest loss of life in these occupancies since at least 1983.

In 1991, a fire in a partially sprinklered high-rise building killed three firefighters in Philadelphia.

More information on this report, and the reaction to it, will be available in an upcoming issue of Campus Firewatch. As soon as the report is available in electronic format it will be placed on the Campus Firewatch website. To be notified, sign up for the Campus Firewatch listserv at www.campus-firewatch.com.

Fast Facts

According to the U.S. Department of Education, there are 5,439,365 full-time undergraduate students enrolled in four-year institutions in the United States. The dormitory capacity of these institutions is 2,059,565, or approximately 38% of the total number of students enrolled.

That means that at least 3,379,800 students, or 62%, are living off-campus.

Source: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Institutional Characteristics and Fall Enrollment Surveys, 1997-98. Prepared for Campus Firewatch.