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## **September Is Campus Fire Safety Month**

As West Virginia's students prepare to begin or return to college, they should be as well informed as possible about fire and life safety issues, whether on- or off-campus. According to *Campus-Firewatch* (a social enterprise focusing on campus fire safety that was started in 2000), 155 people died between January 2000 and July 2012 in campus-related fires. These fires happened both on- and off-campus. Many other people have also lost their housing and personal belongings, and have been burned in fires that should have been prevented just by keeping some basic fire safety practices in mind.

**Here are some important questions from *Campus-Firewatch* for STUDENTS and PARENTS to ask:**

- How many fires have happened on campus in the past year? How many in off-campus housing?
- Are residence halls, Greek housing or off-campus housing protected by automatic fire sprinklers?
- Does every student's room have a smoke alarm? If so, does it send a signal to campus security, or to the fire department?
- Do you know how many false alarms have occurred in residence halls? False alarms are dangerous on their own in that they can cause students and staff to stop paying attention to the alarms—and that can be a fatal decision.
- What are the disciplinary steps the college will take against anyone causing a false alarm, failing to evacuate during an alarm, or tampering with fire safety equipment?

- In case of **any** alarm system activation, is the fire department immediately notified?
- What items—and practices—are prohibited in residence halls because of fire safety? Make sure that candles, firepots, and halogen lamps are not permitted, and that smoking is off limits.
- What are the school's policies on permissible and safe electrical appliances such as surge protectors, etc.?
- How much fire prevention training does the residence hall staff receive?
- How often do students themselves receive fire prevention education?
- How often are evacuation drills conducted? *There should be at least one per semester.*
- How often are fire safety inspections of the residence halls and student rooms done? Are the results shared with students and parents?
- For off-campus housing, are there working smoke alarms in each bedroom and on each level?
- Are there couches or upholstered furniture on the front porch or deck? *Many communities, including in West Virginia, have banned these due to fires having started in couches and spread into houses, especially in high fire-risk areas.*
- Are students and parents aware that setting fires is a serious crime, and can be punishable by fines and time in prison?

- **Federal Law - Campus Fire Safety Right-to-Know Act**

Signed into law by then-President Bush, this law is designed to increase fire safety awareness on college/university campuses across the nation by providing students and their families with the fire safety records of colleges/universities. This act was designed to require post-secondary institutions to publicly display fire safety information and statistics, much as they already do with other safety statistics, such as campus theft and assault. This information would inform prospective and current students of the policies, concerns and fire safety conditions that are present at the institution in which they have applied or are enrolled.

- **For more information, check out this website:**

**<http://www.campus-firewatch.com/resources/ncfsmresources>**

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