

Required Reading Series:

Dangers lurking in the night

After a long day of classes, sports and activities, your students return to their dormitories to sleep. It should be that simple, but common practices and habits can turn deadly. Student housing fires are a leading cause of concern for most institutions. Why? U.S. fire departments respond to an estimated 3,879 structure fires in dormitories, fraternities, sororities and barracks each year.¹ That means that in your state alone, there will be an average of 78 fires at institutions like yours this year.

Simple steps can be taken to help reduce risk and protect your students.

Educate your students about smart sleep practices

- **Turn off the hot plate.** Unattended cooking devices or over-taxed electrical systems due to these devices were blamed for 83% of these fires.¹ Advise students to unplug any unattended counter-cooking devices whenever they sleep or leave the room as a matter of practice.
- **Turn off the space heater.** Space heaters account for 40% of home fires in the U.S. each year.² *If your institution allows personal heaters*, be sure to educate students on the importance of turning off their heaters when they go to sleep or leave their room. Keep anything that can burn a minimum of 3' away from heaters at all times.
- **Charge your cell phone or portable device AWAY from your bed.** Not only will a student sleep more restfully without the chirping of status updates all night long, but cell phones have been shown to ignite when not properly vented. Heat from their battery and operation can collect in soft bedding and cause fires directly under pillows or near students' heads where they may have been last operated. Watch one such story as reported by FOX News here:
<http://myfox8.com/2014/07/25/samsung-phone-catches-fire-under-girls-pillow/>

Develop a plan of Smart Facilities Management

- **Test smoke alarms and fire systems regularly.** Standard facilities management practices will have this one covered, but remember that not all of your students live on campus. Ensure a student outreach campaign to encourage regular monthly testing of smoke detectors or alarm systems in your campus community.
- **Furnish with risk in mind.** Institution provided furnishings need to be sure to go through stringent selection processes to avoid or minimize fire risk. Risk here isn't only from the flames and toxic smoke themselves. Many chemicals used to treat mattresses and furnishings are linked to problems with infertility, birth defects, lower IQ scores, behavioral problems in children, and liver, kidney, testicular, and breast cancers.³

Taking the time to educate your selection committee about the risk of fire (and risks of preventing fire with additive FR chemicals) will pay off in added peace of mind AND reduced risk of fire and student health concerns at your institution. ■

Additional reading:

The Center for Campus Fire Safety <http://www.campusfiresafety.org/TrainingActivities/CampusFireSafetyforStudents/Share.aspx>

"NFPA Tips for smoke detectors"

<http://www.nfpa.org/public-education/by-topic/property-type-and-vehicles/campus-and-dorm-fires/campus-and-dorm-fire-safety-tips>

"8 Sickening Facts About Fire Retardants" <http://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2013/12/11/8-flame-retardant-facts.aspx>

Manufacturer's Note:

University Sleep Products manufactures Modern Dormitory Mattresses™ made in the USA without added spray-on FR chemicals and chemicals of concern. We undergo stringent third party testing to ensure your students healthier, safer mattresses each night. Visit www.universitiesleep.com to learn more or contact us at info@universitiesleep.com or call 317-984-4639. ■

1. Source: National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)'s "Structure Fires in Dormitories, Fraternities, Sororities and Barracks" report

2. Source: National Fire Protection Association (NFPA)'s "Home Fires Involving Heating Equipment" report

3. Source: Mercola.com "8 Sickening Facts About Fire Retardants" <http://articles.mercola.com/sites/articles/archive/2013/12/11/8-flame-retardant-facts.aspx>