



September 2009

On/Off-Campus Fires: Statistics and Causes

ASSE Fact Sheet 1

In an effort to reduce the incidence of on and off-campus fires, the American Society of Safety Engineers' (ASSE) Fire Protection Practice Specialty is providing key safety tips and resources for students and parents. Founded in 1911, ASSE is committed to protecting people, property and the environment. ASSE encourages students to work with their student organizations and their college administration to promote fire safety. For more information on on/off-campus fire prevention go to www.asse.org/newsroom.

Statistics

- The leading cause of fires in dormitories¹ is cooking equipment (75%) and the leading cause of civilian deaths (39%) is attributed to smoking materials such as lighted tobacco products.²
- From 2003-2006, U.S. fire departments responded to an estimated average of 3,570 structure fires in dormitories, fraternities, sororities, and barracks. These fires caused an annual average of seven civilian deaths, 54 civilian fire injuries, and \$29.4 million in direct property damage.³
- Out of the 135 campus-related fire fatalities that occurred from January 2000 to the present, 113 of them occurred off-campus.⁴
- Most victims of fires die from smoke or toxic gases, not from burns.⁵
- The U.S. Fire Administration (USFA) notes that there is a strong link between fire deaths and alcohol stating that in more than 50 percent of adult fire fatalities, the victims were under the influence of alcohol at the time of the fires. In addition, the USFA's Fire Safety 101 fact sheet states, "In cases where fire fatalities occurred on college campuses, alcohol was a factor."⁶
- In a 2002 U.S. Fire Administration report on Fraternity and Sorority house fires, arson was listed as the leading cause of Greek house fires with open flames being the second leading cause.⁷
- January, May, September and October are the peak months for fires in Greek houses, due in part to graduation parties and rush events. Most dormitory fires occur while school is in session.⁸

For more information or copies please go to www.asse.org/newsroom or contact customer service at 847-699-2929 of customerservice@asse.org

¹ Dormitories include school, college and university dormitories, fraternity and sorority houses, monasteries, bunkhouses, barracks, and nurses' quarters or related properties reported to local fire departments. The statistics do not apply to off-campus housing not owned by universities.

² National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) "Structure Fires In Dormitories, Fraternities, Sororities And Barracks" August 2009

³ NFPA

⁴ U.S. Fire Administration (USFA)

⁵ U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) Fire Deaths and Injuries Fact Sheet
March 2006

⁷ U.S. Fire Administration/FEMA Topical Fire Research Series – March 2002 'Fraternity and Sorority House Fires'

⁸ Ibid.