

Practicing Fire Safety is Important for On-Campus and Off-Campus Living

College is the first taste of independence for many young adults. For the first time, students may be responsible for all aspects of their daily living. This can be an overwhelming time in a person's life and an important time to put safety practices into use. According to the United States Fire Administration, cooking fires are the number one cause of fire injury on college campuses. The [S.C. Division of Fire and Life Safety](#) recommend the following guidelines to help promote fire safety in student housing:

- Follow the dormitory rules regarding possession and use of cooking appliances.
- Use cooking appliances correctly. Do not overload electrical outlets or extension cords.
- Pay attention when cooking. Do not get sidetracked or leave cooking unattended.
- Move items such as potholders or dishtowels away from cooking surfaces.

Although many higher education facilities have already banned the use of candles in on-campus housing, approximately 66 percent of college students live off-campus. Many students reside in one and two-family dwellings and apartment buildings, which places them in a high-risk category. "Candles have become a leading cause of residential fires and fires that lead to death," [said John Reich, Deputy Director for the Division of Fire and Life Safety](#). Fires caused by candles increase during the month of December, doubling the average monthly number of candle fires. "People are going to use candles: it has become a tradition, especially around the holidays," [Reich said](#). "If they are going to be used, it is important to use them safely and responsibly."

The Division of Fire and Life Safety, the NFPA and the Center for Campus Fire Safety recommends the following tips for using candles safely:

- Extinguish all candles when leaving the room or going to sleep. Why? More than 1/3 of the candle fires occur when candles are left unattended; 41 percent of the fires occurred in the bedroom; and in 12 percent of the fires, the mattress or bedding was ignited first.
- Keep candles away from things that can catch fire, such as clothing, books, paper, curtains, Christmas trees or decorations, and don't place lit candles in windows, where they may ignite blinds or curtains. Why? Candles don't spread the fire; it is what they ignite that spreads the fire! A common scenario includes a curtain being blown over a candle and igniting. It may have seemed that the candle was in a safe place, until the wind blew the curtain.
- Place candles on stable furniture in sturdy holders that won't tip over and that are big enough to collect dripping wax. Place candles only in areas where they won't be knocked over by children or pets. Why? If a candle gets knocked over, it can ignite other combustibles such as furniture, papers, blankets, etc.
- Avoid candles with combustible materials embedded in them, or with holders or decorations that could ignite. Why? A candle with materials imbedded in them may look pretty, but what happens when the candle burns down enough to reach them? They will ignite and possibly spread fire beyond the candle.

Other fire safety tips to keep in mind include:

- Learn the proper contact number for the fire department, and keep the number near the telephone.
- Make a fire escape plan. Check exit doors and windows to make sure they are working properly.
- Take every fire alarm seriously. Know and follow the evacuation plans as posted.
- Follow local regulations, and the manufacturer's guidelines for heating devices.
- Do not overload electrical outlets, and make sure extension cords are used properly.
- If you smoke, use caution and follow applicable rules & regulations.

"College should be a positive learning experience. Being responsible and using good fire safety behavior can only make your experience that much safer," says **John Reich**.