



Facts About Fire Safety and Smoking

According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), smoking materials, such as cigarettes and matches, are “the number one cause of civilian fire deaths.” Usually, these fires are caused by smoking materials that were carelessly disposed of or forgotten.

In 1998, fires caused by smoking materials killed more than 900 people, injured almost 2,500, and caused \$411.7 million in direct property damage.¹

The location of the people killed by cigarette-related fires indicates how easily and quickly fire can spread through a building. About 30% of the victims were involved in the ignition. Another 28% were in the same room as the ignition, while 40% of the victims were not in the room but were either on the same floor or elsewhere in the building. In other words, 40% of the people killed by the fire were remote from where it started, yet were still killed by the fire.¹

Smoking cigarettes goes hand in hand with drinking alcohol. When people become intoxicated, they also become more likely to be careless with or forget their smoking materials.²

Students who smoke indoors often cover smoke detectors to prevent them from being set off. In the event of a real fire, the detectors will not be able to function properly and the building – and possibly lives – will be lost.¹

¹ **Living with Fire. A Smoking and Fire Safety Information Bulletin from the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. October 29, 2001.**

² **National Fire Protection Association. Fire Protection Handbook. 18th Ed. Quincy: National Fire Protection Association, 1997. 2-73.**

As of 1999, only 27% of 4-year residential colleges in the United States prohibited smoking everywhere on campus, including living areas in dormitories.³

Assess your campus fire prevention policy. Most schools prohibit the following in campus housing:

- **possession of any type of halogen lighting fixture producing open flames**
- **burning incense for any reason**
- **placing clothing, fabrics or other flammable materials over lights or electrical fixtures**
- **possession of and/or use of any heat-producing cooking appliance in private bedrooms**
- **possession of natural evergreen trees, boughs, or wreaths**
- **storage (or use) of any flammable liquid such as gasoline, lighter fluid, containers of butane (other than individual lighters), etc. in residence halls**

With all of these fire prevention regulations in place, why would schools even hesitate to ban smoking in campus housing? We should not make any exceptions to protecting public safety. Smoking should be expressly prohibited in all college property – including housing – and college fire safety professional should become engaged in education and enforcement.

**For more information, visit the Living with Fire Web site at:
<http://www.usfa.fema.gov/safety/campus/infobulletins.htm>**

³ **Rigotti, Nancy A., MD. "Cigarette Use by College Students in Smoke-Free Housing." American Journal of Preventative Medicine. Vol. 20, No. 3, 2001.**