



OFF-CAMPUS

By Tim Knisely

April 2015

Student Created Holidays:

Just when you begin to think that everything is under control in your neighborhoods, with winter coming to an end and Spring Break is near, you get details about a new holiday celebration that is being planned. You then find out that the primary purpose of the holiday is to have a large bash, a party to end all parties - all day long. Maybe all weekend! Social media is the outlet in which these events are developed and shared. Within seconds these events are announced across the world. Local stores will begin selling t-shirts bearing the name of the event:

St. Fratty's Day, State Patty's Day, Blarney Blowout, Unofficial, IUPatty's Day, and many more.

But, what is this all about?

Many of these student created holidays have been created because

classes won't be in session during St. Patrick's Day, as the students will be gone for Spring Break. So, a make-up session was planned. In some communities this day was established by the tavern owners to make up for lost revenue due to the missed day or weekend. And, if your community doesn't have a plan, be ready - because this day is likely on its way.

What do these "holidays" mean for you? It may be something like you've never seen before. Huge numbers of students will descend on your town with no other purpose beyond drinking. If the bars aren't open yet (because it's 7 AM) the parties will begin in the residence halls or the off-campus houses and apartments. Due to the holiday only occurring locally on this particular day, many others will travel to visit their friends in your town with the same purpose.

Some towns have experienced riots as the house and yard parties merge into one large gathering in a block. The party-goers seem to be fine until a fight starts, or someone tries to get control - such as the police or the property managers. Then, it can get worse.



James J. Nestor/Gazette photo

If your public safety agencies aren't prepared they will be quickly overwhelmed and outnumbered. Hospitals, EMS crews and especially the police will need help. It may take some time to gather the resources needed to contain or



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control the crowds. Once the parties get out of control or the riots begin the crowds will continue to grow as news spreads quickly, again by social media.

For the community caught off-guard local officials will spend the next year preparing for the next event, first hoping to stop it. Once all of the attention is given to these events by the media and the local residents there is a good chance that the event will continue to grow in size or attendees the following year. Stepped up enforcement will generate dozens of arrests, hospital emergency rooms will be overloaded and your streets littered with trash and passed out revelers, once again. Landlords and property managers will hire security and place restrictions on their tenants. Some landlords will place addendums in their leases, close off porches to prevent gatherings and impose

finer for breaking the rules. After a few years it may stop, or at best it may be similar in scope and size of regular events such as sporting events, making it more manageable.

When these events are occurring the fire risk is also elevated. More parties than normal, people unfamiliar with their surroundings and large yard parties that eventually move inside overloading the structure.



Mustang News Photo: Shows garage before the roof collapsed, injuring nine.

Streets will be blocked, some closed off by police controlling crowds affecting your response. Fires will be reported in the streets involving sofas, trash cans and dumpsters. Fire pits or bonfires, permitted or not will increase the risk and the number of responses by the fire department.

If you've experienced these events I'm interested to know how your community contained or controlled the activities, even if they are works in progress. Please share these experiences on The Center's [Off-Campus Fire & Life Safety Alliance](#). If you haven't joined yet, follow the link and send your request.





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Tim Knisely is on the Board of Directors for The Center and the Senior Fire Inspector for the Centre Region Code Administration in State College, PA.

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