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CAMPUS FIRE SAFETY CODE TALK

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Fire Safety Abroad

How college students studying overseas can stay fire safe

By Lorrainne Carli, Vice President vice president of outreach and advocacy for NFPA

In 2010, my daughter headed off to study abroad in Barcelona. Since I work in fire safety, I'm sure I told her to be careful and to always look for a way out every time she entered a building. However, back then I don't think I fully grasped the differences between the United States and other countries when it came to fire safety and public education. I do now.

In the fall of 2016, I attended the Center for Campus Fire Safety's Annual Campus Fire Forum and listened to representatives from the Jasmine Jahanshahi Fire Safety Foundation. The foundation is devoted to making studying abroad more fire safe for the approximately 300,000 U.S. students studying in other countries as part of their college experience. The foundation provides critical resources that include discounted access to fire safety equipment such as smoke alarms and escape ladders. It has also compiled a list of the emergency numbers for many of the most popular destinations for exchange students and other safety information, [all available online](#).

The foundation was founded in 2011 by the family and friends of Jasmine Jahanshahi. Jasmine was among a group of students studying abroad in Paris in 2011 when she and three friends died when they jumped out of windows as a fast-moving fire swept through the building where they lived. One other person died in the building and dozens of others were injured in the fire, which occurred in the Menilmontant section of Paris, a densely populated area with older buildings. The building where Jasmine and her friends lived had no smoke alarms, no fire escapes, and narrow wooden stairwells that became overcrowded and impassable in the fire. According to news accounts, this area of the city had previously experienced other tragic fires with



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similar conditions. I can't imagine the horror of the scenario for these young students who had their whole lives ahead of them, or the horror experienced by their parents and relatives who probably expected a certain level of safety for these children.

While we have not solved the fire problem in and around colleges here in the U.S., there are a few factors that make the situation here different than in other countries in terms of fire safety. For one, the U.S. maintains a strong commitment to education and code enforcement that contributes to a safer environment for students. We are also able to build on public education efforts targeting U.S. kids from early ages, as well as requirements for smoke alarms in all occupancies and fire sprinklers in many college dorms and other residences. These factors don't exist everywhere. Many residences in Europe, for instance, are not required to have smoke alarms. Similar to Jasmine's apartment, many residential buildings are old, constructed of wood, and often without fire protection or adequate exits.

Jasmine's story, while painful, is also a reminder that simple actions can save lives. We need to do all we can to share these safety tips with students travelling abroad. My favorite three tips: take a couple of battery-operated smoke alarms with you and place them in the apartment; try to live on a low floor so you can be reached by a fire truck ladder; and choose a residence made of brick or stone rather than wood and with unobstructed windows.

There are other ways to stay safe, too. NFPA has been working with the Center for Campus Fire Safety and other organizations for a number of years to look for creative ways to reach college students for whom fire safety isn't usually a pressing concern—more information on those efforts can be found [online](#). By spreading these messages, we can take fire safety abroad.



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Along with serving as president of the Home Fire Sprinkler Coalition, Carli is a member of the Board of Directors for both The Phoenix Society for Burn Survivors and Electric Safety Foundation International (ESFI) and now The Center for Campus Fire Safety.

Prior to joining NFPA, Carli was a public relations consultant working with health care, medical technology, government, and non-profit organizations. Before her role as a consultant Carli was the director of marketing services for Speedline Technologies, overseeing global public relations, marketing communication and advertising; and was director of communications for CareGroup, a network of hospitals in Massachusetts. She began her career in state government, where she was most noted for her more than decade tenure as the director of public affairs for the Massachusetts Department of Social Services.

Carli holds a bachelor's degree in journalism and a master's of education. She is also an adjunct professor at Suffolk University in Boston, teaching graduate public relations courses.

