



OFF-CAMPUS

By Tim Knisely

January 2016

Fire Extinguishers - A Training Tool for the [OCFLS Alliance](#):

Frequently through an academic year I'm made aware of kitchen fires that were extinguished by tenants using the fire extinguisher that is located in their house or apartment. These fires aren't always reported to the fire department because the fire is quickly controlled. The good news is that the fire was quickly controlled and no one was hurt. Unfortunately, some of these fires may not be extinguished and the fire continues to burn and spread. This can result in a delay of the FD response and significantly more damage, sometimes with people being injured.

Other times, tenants fail to notify the building maintenance that the extinguisher was used and it never gets recharged. Tenants may not report these fires because they

are worried about getting in trouble, or they don't want the additional fees for recharge and cleaning.

Depending on the state or local code that applies to an off-campus dwelling there may or may not be a fire extinguisher available for the tenant's use. Apartment building occupants may have access to an extinguisher in the corridor or common area, if not in their own apartment.

No matter what type is available it is imperative for the user to know how to choose the proper type and know how to properly use an extinguisher, call for help and alert others before trying to put out a fire. How can we make sure that the tenants are properly informed?

All new fire extinguishers have instructions on the label and symbols that indicate the rating for

the applicable type of fire. But, who has time to read this when there's a fire? We also need to be sure that the extinguisher is ready for use and not previously discharged for another fire, or as a prank.

Training: We've all likely seen examples when a tenant doesn't know how to use an extinguisher during a fire. I've found extinguishers outside of the house with the handles mangled together, tossed out because it didn't work. Only to find during the investigation that no one pulled the pin. Last month I mentioned where a tenant carried an extinguisher next door to ask the neighbor to put out the fire. And one of the best, someone threw the extinguisher into the fire from the outside, hoping the extinguisher would explode from the heat and extinguish the fire.

All of these and many more prove that knowledge of the



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proper use of an extinguisher isn't common. We can use brochures, videos, and many options using social media. But, unless someone uses an extinguisher on a 'real' training fire - they won't know what to expect. To feel the heat, observe the lack of visibility both before and after use. And, know what they'll do if the fire doesn't go out.

So what do you do?

Fire extinguisher simulators provide the real fire experience, but are expensive and time consuming. Cheaper methods are available using an old stove top and a pan, but create more risk and still a great deal of staff time to both train and clean up. How can we commit the time and funds necessary to provide this type of training, at least once during their college years?

Videos and brochures allow you to provide outreach to more

attendees, and even more on their time if the resources are available on-line. If the RA's are provided video or hands-on training during their in-service training, this needs to be shared. How can we provide opportunities so they can share this experience with the students on their floor?

I'm curious to see what innovative methods are used to provide this training and how you continually provide this training to new students, and how this can benefit those living off-campus.

I'm also looking to see if communities discourage the use of extinguishers to avoid placing a student in danger from the fire. Or, are the extinguishers removed to avoid the risk to the tenant as well as eliminating the temptation for tampering and vandalism.

Please log in to the Off-Campus Fire & Life

Safety Alliance to join the discussion and help to share your experiences or learn new ideas to try. Not yet a member? Click [here](#):

Thanks for your help and Happy New Year!

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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.

In this position he manages the Existing Structures Division that administers the fire and property maintenance code in all existing commercial and residential rental properties, and coordinates the life safety education for the community including off-campus and Greek housing.

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