



## OFF-CAMPUS

By Tim Knisely

October 2014

---

### Halloween Safety:

Halloween is just around the corner and in many college towns this night is one of the busiest of the year for police, fire and EMS responses. The off-campus neighborhoods will be brimming with spooky and eye-catching sights as they head out to their many destinations.

Halloween this year falls on a Friday and will likely have an increased number of participants increasing the risk that much more.

The off-campus party is already full of risk due to the age of the housing stock, improperly designed for large occupant loads, disabled smoke alarms and the lack of automatic fire detection or suppression systems. Add the alcohol factor and the weekend Halloween party is ripe for disaster. One of the factors for the increased risk is the use of decorative materials

inside and outside of buildings, without any regard for the hazard that is being created. Inside decorations may include straw, plastic, cornstalks or crepe paper. Decorative lighting or candles are often mixed in with the decorations, and don't forget the poorly discarded cigarette. But, be especially mindful of the candle. Across all housing types, the careless use of candles is to blame for many of the fires we have seen in the past years. In fact, according to the NFPA™, of the 900 reported home fires each Halloween, 40% are started by a candle too close to the decorations. So not only does our risk increase in the campus community, so does the risk in all other neighborhoods we need to protect.

Some houses, especially fraternity houses may hold haunted houses or haunted mazes inside the house or basements and often start with

good intentions. I've seen these used initially for philanthropic or community events, and then the same theme is at play during the overcrowded party late into the night or for the entire weekend. Some of the designs are really creative and interesting to the untrained eye, but little thought is given to emergency escape or obstructions to the fire protection systems.

Unfortunately, many of the decorations used in these events are combustible or even flammable. These may include floor to ceiling wood frames wrapped in chicken wire and black plastic sheeting, spot lights, overloaded extension cords, dry leaves, straw, mulch and many other props to create the intended theme. Not only does this type of event place the attendees at risk, but it also creates additional risk for first responders as well as increases the workload in searching for the fire or trapped occupants.



## OFF-CAMPUS

By Tim Knisely

October 2014

If you have any ability to provide outreach to the student population, encourage them to use flame-resistant decorations or battery-powered candles both inside and out. Work with fraternity leadership to use flame-resistant decorations and to request guidance from the fire marshal before hosting any themed events or events open to the public. And, if you see someone wrapped in tissue paper dressed as a mummy - remind him or her not to smoke as the last one to do so ended up in the hospital.

### Tim Knisely

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.

Tim has been active with The Center for Campus Fire Safety since its inception and served as treasurer from 2007 to 2010.

He is a frequent presenter at Campus Fire Forum, an instructor for the Fire-Wise Campus program and served as project manager for Campus Fire Data.



Published by The Center for Campus Fire Safety.

[www.campusfiresafety.org](http://www.campusfiresafety.org)  
978.961.0410 | [email](mailto:)

Have a safe and happy Halloween!