



# OFF-CAMPUS

By Tim Knisely

January 2014

## What is Off-Campus?

This month's column may leave you with more questions than answers. When we talk about off-campus fire incidents and try to define what qualifies as such, you could find a differing opinion from just about everyone you ask. Off-campus housing varies greatly from town to town.



**R-2 Fraternity**

Some off-campus housing include Greek housing and others are privately owned residence halls adjacent to the university. The large majority is the older housing stock in the community that is close to the campus. Many were once single family homes that have been chopped up and divided into apartments or rooming houses. Often times this was done long before there were fire codes in place that required

building components or building structure to prevent or slow the spread of fire, and even longer before smoke alarms were required. Statistics tell us that 66% of all students live off-campus, while more than 80% of all student fire deaths occur off-campus. So, how far reaching is off-campus? Is it a specified distance away from the campus? Is it any location where a student lives or visits? Is it a student that lives in their family owned house, with or without roommates? A report by the USA Today (January 24, 2006) found that 76% of the students who died in fires were within 2 miles of campus; 73% were within 1 mile. Only 14% died on campus.



**R-2 High Rise MFD**



**R-4 Duplex**

At previous Campus Fire Forums parts of the "Town Meeting" discussion was related to this topic. The attendees had many different opinions and some great ideas were discussed. Still, no definite determination could be reached and it was agreed that more discussion was needed to define this question. On October 28, 2007, seven students died and six were injured in a beach house fire in Ocean Isle Beach, North Carolina. Six of the seven students that died were from the University of South Carolina and the seventh attended Clemson University. The house was owned by the family of one of the students.

In the early morning hours of March 16, 2008, a fire occurred in Acapulco, Mexico. Hundreds of college students from around the United States



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were evacuated from their Spring Break hotel. When the fire broke out many occupants were forced to crawl from their rooms in smoke filled corridors to the stair towers to escape. Fortunately, only minor injuries were reported.

**Should these fires be labeled as Off-Campus fires?**

**Should these only be counted if the fire occurs in the residence utilized by the student while attending college?**

**What about those visiting or staying with the student that becomes a victim, such as family or friends? Should these be counted?**

Every summer students travel away from home and campus for internships, summer jobs and may even be traveling abroad. Hopefully, fire safety will be on their minds when choosing a place to stay.

Unfortunately, it probably won't be.

**Does the university have any responsibility for these students when**

**they are away from the campus?**

At the Town Meeting, most agreed that no matter what type of fire or where the fire occurs it should be on our radar. We should attempt to find out what happened, what were the contributing factors? Maybe more importantly, what type of educational outreach can be done at the home campus - or what lessons could be learned nationwide.

**On-line Nationwide Campus Fire Reporting Program:**

How can we better identify what fires have occurred within the campus community?

With an initial grant from the Department of Homeland Security and later with support from our sponsor, NEMA, The Center developed an on-line, nationwide, campus fire reporting program to provide a starting point to gather accurate and detailed fire data occurring in the campus communities.

Several of you have input data over the years - but

as always, the more data received - the better our statistics so please give this a try at:

[www.campusfiredata.org](http://www.campusfiredata.org)

Your data input helps us to address many of the questions listed in this article by producing accurate statistics that can be used as we develop educational outreach materials for all of the target audiences on your campus, or in the town where the campus is located.

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**Tim Knisely**

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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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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.



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