



## **OFF-CAMPUS**

By Tim Knisely

September 2018

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### ***Residence Halls Without Sprinklers – How Many Are There?***

This month we're going to steer a little off the topic of off-campus housing and look at an issue with on-campus housing. That is the lack of sprinklers, still, in campus-owned residential buildings. Many colleges and universities have made great strides in protecting their students with sprinklers and modern fire detection systems. The CCFS believes that balanced fire protection provides the best protection for any residential use group. There are some colleges that have financial struggles or infrastructure issues that make installing sprinklers a challenge. While others don't believe that sprinklers are necessary. I've heard college administrators state that the building is built out of concrete and steel - what can burn! Others believe that having alarms only is enough, because the building has been there for 100 years and hasn't had a fire - yet. Unfortunately, these statements are often contrary to the efforts of their very own fire safety staff that diligently work in the buildings and understand the risks. So, how can we do better?

The Clery Act (HEOA) requires institutions of higher education to report, among other statistics, fire safety reporting requirements for institutions with on-campus student housing facilities. For those that are unfamiliar with this report, it contains very specific detail of the following:

- A description of each on-campus student housing facility fire safety system



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- The number of fire drills held during the previous calendar year
  - Policies or rules on electric appliances, smoking and open flames
  - Policies regarding fire safety education and training programs provided to faculty and staff

These reports are generated by the institution and made available to the public.

Ideally, these are designed to aid students and their parents in selecting the best college or university to attend based on these and other considerations.

Now, we have all this great data, but there is no way to compile this data for comparison across states, regions or even sports conferences - at least easily.

In Pittsburgh, PA - the fire chief has recently proposed a sprinkler retrofit ordinance for all high-rise buildings that lack sprinklers due to being built prior to the modern codes. This effort was prompted by a fatal fire that occurred in 2017. Due to some good reporting by the Post-Gazette reporters, they identified a list of residential college buildings that lacked sprinklers. Some of these taller buildings would be affected by the retrofit law. The Post-Gazette staff used the Clery Fire and Security report for each college located within the city to identify these buildings.

We now have our first compiled report for the City of Pittsburgh! But, this takes time and money. How can we expand this effort? How many college residence halls lack sprinklers across Pennsylvania, the Mid-Atlantic region, East of the Mississippi or the



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West Coast? Who knows for sure, without conducting the painstaking research of each college - one at a time. Can it be done? Sure. There are more than 4,000 colleges and universities in the US. There needs to be a way to compile all this useful data that is submitted for each college and university. We need to find a way to make this happen.

Related articles:

<http://www.post-gazette.com/local/city/2018/09/25/Pittsburgh-sprinklers-high-rise-mandate-fatal-fire-Midtown-Towers/stories/201809250095>

<http://www.post-gazette.com/local/city/2017/08/25/Pitt-Carnegie-Mellon-fire-sprinklers-safety-high-rise-Clery-Act-Pittsburgh-colleges-universities-dorm-residences/stories/201708260010>





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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.



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