



OFF-CAMPUS

By Tim Knisely

July 2015

Move-In Guide for Off-Campus Housing:

Living off-campus is often times the first true taste of independent living for a college student. As excited as they may be - here are some tips to follow to help make a smooth transition. For more information check with your landlord or the student affairs office for publications that will offer specific help with move-in issues.

On move in day when arriving at the property don't be in a big rush to start unloading. Make sure the property is ready for occupancy and utilize a move-in

checklist to be sure everything is in move-in condition and functioning. Be sure to note any deficiencies and even photograph or video the conditions for later use. It isn't uncommon to find items that are broken or not working properly. You need to determine if this is a significant issue that needs reported immediately, or a routine maintenance item that can be included on your checklist and fixed in the next week or two.

Some important items to inspect include:

Lighting: be sure that all switches and lights work. Note that some

receptacles are controlled by the switch, so you may need to identify the ones that are. Also check the exterior lighting to be sure these work at night. Keep in mind that some lights are controlled by sensors and not switches.

Windows: open all windows to be sure these open easily and stay open. This is especially important for the bedroom windows in the event of an emergency. Also, look for sash locks or other locking means if the windows are within six feet of grade.



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Doors: check all doors for proper operation and a tight seal. A dead bolt should be installed on all exterior doors, but be openable from the inside by using a knob - not a key. Bedroom doors may have locks depending on local codes or the owner's standards. If you aren't satisfied with the locks on any of the doors, be sure to consult with the owner before making any changes.

Kitchen: check all kitchen appliances for proper operation and cleanliness. For the stove, make sure the students living there all know how the features

work as well as the on/off indicators.

Bathroom: check all fixtures for both hot and cold water, and be sure there aren't any leaks in the drain lines or drips from the faucets.

Safety Equipment: It is best to know in advance what safety equipment is provided by the landlord or required by local code. If some items aren't required to be installed you may want to consider providing them yourself.

Smoke alarm: need to be installed in every bedroom and every level of the dwelling.

Check the date of manufacture to be sure the alarm is < 10 years old.

Carbon monoxide alarm: need to be installed near the bedrooms if a fossil fuel is used for heating, cooking, or if there is an attached garage. Check the date of manufacture to be sure the alarm hasn't expired. Some CO alarms expire at 5, 7 or 10 years depending on the manufacturer.

Fire extinguisher: a kitchen media extinguisher should be installed near the kitchen, or a multi-purpose extinguisher should be available in



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the dwelling or a nearby corridor. Tenants should know how to use an extinguisher before there is a fire.

Escape ladder: if a bedroom is on an upper floor, especially third floor - consider supplying a ladder that is designed for the proper height. Have the tenant open and deploy the ladder as a practice run, before needing to use it in the middle of the night.

Sprinklers: hopefully, your off-campus property is protected by sprinklers. Sprinklers don't require any maintenance by the tenants, but be sure to know where these are

located. Don't block the sprinkler with furniture, decorations or tapestries. Don't paint a sprinkler or the concealed cover. And remember, smoke will not activate a sprinkler.

What is expected of tenants?

Each town and property are different. Become familiar with the laws and expectations of residents within the town. If you have pets be sure to know the rules both inside your house and on neighboring property. Be a good neighbor and remember that some residents live in the town year round and

some may have children that go to bed early.

If you have any problems with your property report it to your landlord immediately. They should provide you with an emergency and non-emergency number. Always document these findings with photos (if applicable) and save your emails. If you have issues with your landlord that cannot be resolved, check with the student affairs office at your university or college. Many have a legal affairs office that can mediate civil issues or lease issues. Or, they may offer you legal advice in solving the matter.



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Last but not least, get renters insurance! This is an inexpensive policy that may save you lots of money in the event of lost possessions or if you cause damage to others, even by accident. Some parent's homeowner's policies will cover a student living on-campus - but not always when off-campus. Check to make sure before it's too late.

Have fun, stay safe and enjoy the semester!

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.

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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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