



OFF-CAMPUS

By Tim Knisely

August 2015

Changing Hats:

The recent move-in weekend had me wearing several hats depending on the issue at hand. My weekend started as a code official, then a parent and last as a firefighter. All of these encounters involved off-campus housing, with each a little different - yet similar at the same time.

Code Official Hat:

Friday started with the inspectors handling the typical complaints that are received during the move-in process. Most deal with basement apartments that have egress and mold issues. Egress windows, a second means of egress and clear exit paths to the public way are essential. Seems like common sense, but not always. Two of the complaints involved apartments that had been closed up for the summer and were quite damp when the tenants moved in. Some tenants renewed the

lease, so there was no prep required by the landlord. Windows and doors are difficult to open, sometimes by the moisture. This can make a difference during an emergency - so always check these. If there are dehumidifiers provided by the landlord - take note. If your son or daughter have allergies to mold, don't rent the basement apartment. In several of these complaints the tenants and the parents were advised to be more careful next year when choosing an apartment. Again - parents need to be involved early on!

Parent Hat: Later that afternoon I changed hats and left town for a 2-hour trip to move my daughter into her first off-campus house. Fortunately, there were no surprises for us as we initially visited the house about 10-months ago for an inspection. This time I met the landlord and we discussed his rules and expectations, and any special details about

the house. Next, with one of the roommates moved in we discussed the differences of the smoke and CO alarm signals, how to test, use of the "hush" button, etc. Next was the proper use of the fire extinguisher and the proper reporting of emergencies. A fire drill was also conducted that included bailing out of the window. Now, after some teasing by her friends and a little embarrassment and fun, we could head for home knowing that everyone is prepared for most household emergencies.

Firefighter Hat: On Sunday, while on shift as a firefighter I was enjoying the Little League World Series as the PA team was in a close game. Then, the fourth inning was interrupted by the report of a kitchen fire in an off-campus apartment complex. On arrival we found the fire was contained to the oven. Fortunately, the tenants in the fire apartment did



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everything right! They called 9-1-1, one used the fire extinguisher and others fled the building - pulling the alarm on the way out. With the fire controlled, the crews had to now deal with a smoke filled building, elevated CO levels and tenants not willing to evacuate. Some were on the balcony above the fire apartment watching the events below. The fire chief cleared the remainder of the building and took the opportunity to explain some basic fire safety practices to those that had gathered outside. What a great time to take a few minutes to educate. A follow up fire prevention program is being conducted with the apartment management to emphasize the importance of evacuating for fire alarms and having an emergency plan. A new year, new residents and new challenges. Good luck to everyone with your new semester, no

matter how many *hats* you wear.

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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