



## OFF-CAMPUS

By Tim Knisely

September 2015

### More on Evacuation:

Last month I mentioned that my fire department responded to a kitchen fire in an off-campus apartment building where many of the occupants in the building did not evacuate. In fact, many were on the balcony watching the FD operation below while breathing in the smoke that was emitting from the fire apartment. Hmm. This isn't anything new, and I'm sure it isn't for you. But does anyone know why? Through all grades of school the students are required to participate in fire drills in their schools. The first year of college,

most students must live in the residence halls where fire drills are mandatory. Now, once again the off-campus students are living on their own for the first time and they need to make decisions for themselves.

This is another example of thinking that "it won't happen to me." But, how can we change this mindset? Should it take a fire tragedy to get their attention? I'm aware of some municipalities that have amended the local fire code to require evacuation in the event of a fire alarm. Should it take this action to cause action?

I'm not opposed to the Defend-In-Place practice if buildings are protected with sprinklers and the alarms are modern enough to allow communications with the tenants or voice messages. Other construction features in the building must also be present. And, tenants must be trained in this policy. But, this won't work in most buildings.

Let's consider what happens when the fire alarm sounds:

- Do the tenants know what the fire alarm sounds like? With many older buildings the alarm sound may not be recognizable



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beyond just a loud blaring horn or siren. Landlords need to inform the tenants of this and educate the tenants on proper actions during a fire alarm. This isn't the best information to include in the lease, but in a separate document or electronic message upon move-in.

- Does the fire department respond automatically, or is it a local alarm? If it is local the tenants need to be informed to call 9-1-1 when the alarm sounds. And, to contact maintenance. The maintenance staff should respond promptly and know how to address the alarm

issue. Make sure they don't act irritated or angry because of the response, because they weren't the only ones having their evening or overnight interrupted.

- What caused the alarm? It may be helpful to follow up with tenants after an alarm activation as to the cause, it could be by email or a text message. Was it burnt food? Was it steam from the shower? Or, was it really a fire? If it was an unwanted alarm, inform the tenants on what is being done, or what can be done to prevent a repeat event. This is also a great time to send them a fire safety message. And,

thank them for evacuating and doing the right thing. You never know - more may evacuate the next time. We'll discuss more tips for landlords next month...

Do you have more ideas? Do you have other trends you'd like to bring up for discussion? Please email me, or better yet choose one or both (hopefully) of these options.

1<sup>st</sup>. Join us at Campus Fire Forum in Niagara Falls in late October for more discussion about evacuation and current topics. The committee is working hard to prepare a top-notch



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conference once again and have a great group of speakers and presentations. The Off-Campus Fire & Life Safety Alliance will offer a chance to bring your issues, trends and ideas to share with the group.

And 2<sup>nd</sup>, if you haven't already joined the on-line Alliance please do so by clicking [here](#). Share your ideas on-line and get a discussion started to get feedback from.

Until next month...

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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.



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