



Off-Campus Fire claims the life of Southern Illinois University student

Alex Kierstead, 20, was found dead Wednesday November 23, 2016 at 4:50 a.m. in his off-campus home.

According to authorities, the structure was engulfed in flames when first responders arrived. The single-family home had been converted into off-campus housing for students at SIU Carbondale.

The body was found in the bedroom on the first floor and pronounced dead on the scene. On the following Monday afternoon, the victim in the house was identified as Alex Kierstead. Carbondale police confirmed Kierstead was the only person in the home at the time of the fire. They said the investigation is ongoing and that foul play is not suspected. An autopsy was conducted Friday but a report has not yet been completed.

Friends and family are mourning the death of Alex who was originally from Aurora. Joe Hein shared the house with him near the SIU Carbondale, where they both attended classes. Hein, in his senior year at SIU left Tuesday to be with his family in Lansing for the Thanksgiving Day holiday. Hein woke up to a call on Wednesday morning that the house burned down. "Alex was one of my best friends," said Hein, 22.

Hein said Kierstead was someone he thought would be his "lifetime friend." In all, four young men shared the house at 700 W. Freeman St. in Carbondale.

This is the second fire fatality in the SIU system in recent years. The other occurred in off-campus housing in April of 2012 at SIU-Edwardsville claiming the lives of two women.

This fire is also the first off-campus fire meeting the criteria set forth by The Center for Campus Fire Safety and United States Fire Administration (USFA) since October 2014.



According to Tim O’Dowd, USFA, prior to this, “during the last five years, there’s been an average of five campus fire deaths, compared to the first five full academic years (2000-2004) where twice as many college students died in fire annually.”

To view both CCFS and USFA Statistical reports, click [HERE](#).

The Center for Campus Fire Safety reflects on this tragedy and also wants to remind everyone of the **importance of properly installing and maintaining smoke detectors and other fire prevention equipment**, in accordance with prescribed codes and standards. But let’s look beyond requirements and ask ourselves what else we can do to avoid potential loss of life from fire.

- Plan your **escape routes** - Identify windows and doors, know two ways out and determine an escape route **before the fire**. Always choose the safest escape route - the one with the least amount smoke and heat. Be prepared to get low under smoke if necessary.
- Keep **escape routes clear** - do not allow objects to be stored in halls or stairwells. Make sure windows can be **easily opened**.
- **Inspect the exterior door** at bottom of stairwell. It must be able to be opened without a key from the inside. **Door cannot be blocked** by snow, cars or other objects.
- Keep an **emergency escape ladder** on upper floors. Follow manufacturer’s instructions for the safe use of emergency escape ladders. Only purchase emergency escape ladders evaluated by a recognized testing laboratory. Only use the ladder from upper floors in a real emergency.



- **Choose a meeting place in advance** - Pick a highly visible area, a safe distance away from the flames, to meet in case of fire related emergency.
- **Be prepared** - Practice your emergency exit routes with each occupant. Practice crawling low to avoid toxic smoke from a fire. Practice feeling doors for heat before opening. Practice opening windows. Practice using an emergency escape ladder from the first floor.

To learn more about The Center and its programs, visit www.campusfiresafety.org.

About The Center for Campus Fire Safety (The Center)

The Center for Campus Fire Safety (The Center) is a non-profit, member focused organization devoted to reducing the loss of life from fire at our nation's campuses. The mission of The Center for Campus Fire Safety is to serve as an advocate for the promotion of campus fire safety. The Center serves as the focal point for the efforts of a number of organizations and also as a clearinghouse for information relating to campus fire safety. Visit us at www.campusfiresafety.org for more information.

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