



off-campus

by tim knisely (CCFS)

Preparing for Move-in

As the fall semester approaches we need to be prepared for the arrival of the new residents to our campus communities. Some will be first year students moving into the residence halls. Hopefully, we are confident that the buildings are prepared for occupancy, especially for fire and life safety. Other arriving students will be moving off-campus and living on their own for the first time. These properties may or may not be ready for the new residents.

To be prepared for the off-campus challenges we need to identify and involve all of our fire safety partners. Some of these partners will include the fire department, landlords, the university's off-campus housing office and the media. These partners have access to the target audiences, some more than one. The target audiences include the students, parents and the university administration.

For most students the last fire safety training they had was in grade school, so stick to the basics. Messages such as test your smoke alarm, plan your escape, be careful with candles and cooking safety address the most common risks. For the parents and the students looking for housing the messages should include key features that they should look for when choosing housing, including smoke alarms in every room, sprinklers with a monitored alarm system and fire extinguishers in every apartment.



To assist in spreading the fire safety messages during move-in you will need to have a variety of approaches:

If your local or campus newspaper publishes a welcome guide for students, submit an article that highlights some of the common hazards or fire history your town has seen. Include a checklist so students and parents can inspect their new home away from home.

Contact the property managers to see if they would distribute fire safety information in the move-in packets. Key chains or refrigerator magnets can be purchased inexpensively that include a fire safety message and the 24-hour maintenance phone number for the management company.

If you have access to roadway sign boards, load these up with fire safety messages and place them near busy roadways that are frequented by arriving students and parents.



Campus or town mass transit systems rent advertising space inside and outside the bus. Your fire safety message displayed on every bus for a month or two will reach thousands per day.

If you need more ideas or resources, get your partners involved. Think about the access they have to the target audiences. The university off-campus housing office may have access to e-mail lists or be able to send text messages to all students living off-campus. Use their web site to link to fire safety resources. If you are going to plan an on-campus safety fair or other event, this office may also be your "in" to reach the university administration for approval.

One of the greatest tools to reach the students is the student firefighter. This peer to peer delivery of information is one of the most effective methods of passing along fire safety information to students. The students also provide much needed staffing in volunteer departments, and can be used to deliver fire safety education programs.



No matter what type of approach you use, remember that repetitive and consistent messages will have the greatest results.

Time is of the essence, so start planning now.



Tim Knisely is the Senior Fire Inspector for the Centre Region Code Administration in State College, PA. He is also on the Board of Directors and Treasurer for the Center for Campus Fire Safety. Write about your off-campus housing experiences. Send your article to Tim Knisely. Tknisely@campusfiresafety.org