



## OFF-CAMPUS

By Tim Knisely

January 2019

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### Escape Room Fire Safety:

Recent news from the country of Poland where a fire in an 'Escape Room' has claimed five teenage victims has raised our awareness once again to fire safety in assembly type occupancies. In this fire, a faulty heating system apparently sparked the blaze and the five victims were locked in the room, with no apparent escape options. The operator of the facility was separated from the room by the fire and could not reach the victims. This fire has caused a nationwide review of all similar occupancy types in Poland. The findings so far are very concerning as many egress and life safety violations have been discovered. In fact, the building where the fire occurred in Poland was formerly a house converted to this death trap, with boarded up windows and no inspections or approvals. The building owner was arrested for creating the hazard and unintentionally causing the deaths.

### What is an Escape Room?

Escape Rooms have grown in popularity around the world in the past five years. In the United States, Escape Rooms are becoming very popular, with the number of locations skyrocketing to over 2,000 locations in just five years. These are especially popular in college towns where the puzzle solving and maze type spaces provide unique and fun events for friends, families, clubs and organizations. In addition, businesses are using these for team building exercises and leadership training. Fortunately, most areas of the US have building and fire codes that prevent



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someone from being locked in a space. However, a simple alteration to a theme within a room or altering a corridor or hallway can affect egress, unknowingly to the untrained person.

While we do not expect to have similar issues with unpermitted work and conversions as happened in Poland, as a building or fire official you should be aware if these facilities are operating in your town or city. The owners are often times hesitant to show the escape options to keep their 'trade secrets', but we need to know that these rooms are safe. Most have small occupant loads of 10 to 20 people and may fall under the 'business' use. However, there is ongoing discussion in the code arena to see if these use groups should be considered as a 'Special Amusement' occupancy. I am sure this discussion will carry on for a number of years as the popularity increases.

So, were curious to know your experiences. Have you ever attended an Escape Room? Did you feel safe? Was it safe? Did you escape in time? On the other hand, as the AHJ did you discover violations?

Please visit our new Off-Campus Facebook page, [@CampusFireandLifeSafetyAlliance](#) and add your comments.

Happy New Year!

**Tim Knisely**



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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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