



## AMERICAN SOCIETY OF SAFETY ENGINEERS

# Recent On/Off-Campus Fire Tragedies

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The following is a list of recent deadly on/off-campus fires. Many schools have fire safety programs and seminars to protect students and prevent fires, and some states have passed laws requiring fire sprinklers on campuses.

- On April 30, 2005, an off-campus fire started on the exterior porch of the house where University of Maryland-College Park students lived. The fire extended to the inside of the building where six people were inside. Four escaped safely, but two were left inside. As a result, one student died and one was critically injured. It was determined to be an arson fire.
- On April 26, 2005, a dormitory fire killed a student at Southern Adventist University in Collegedale, Tenn. The small fire broke out in the kitchen of a women's dormitory around 3:30 a.m. The fire was on the top floor of a three-story women's dorm, and flames shot through the roof.
- On Nov. 9, 2003, an early morning fire at the University of Connecticut in Storrs, Conn. destroyed a fraternity house. Five residents were in the building at the time of the fire. There were no working fire alarms in the building.
- On Sept. 26, 2003, a fraternity fire at the University of Wisconsin-Madison occurred in a secret room. The entrance to the room was made to look like a wall. Fire fighters were unable to locate the source of the fire despite the extensive search of the house. A candle that ignited some fabric and then spread to a chair caused the fire. There were no fire sprinklers present.
- On Feb. 22, 2003, a fatal off-campus house fire at Allegheny College in Meadville, Pa., occurred in a 3-story, wood frame house that had been converted into apartments. There were single-station, battery-operated smoke detectors in the apartments.
- On Jan. 1, 2003 in University Park, Penn., a fire at Pennsylvania State University displaced 11 Penn State students from their off-campus rooming house. Activated smoke detectors awakened two occupants who were able to escape the building. The other occupants were away for the holiday break. Fire loss was estimated at \$40,000 damage.
- On April 7, 2002, an early morning fire at DePauw University in Greencastle, Ind., caused over \$1 million in damage. The fire, which started from an electrical appliance in a fourth-floor room, forced the evacuation of 116 students from the building and more than 200 students from adjacent buildings. The building was not equipped with an automatic fire sprinkler system.
- On Feb. 16, 2002, a halogen lamp at Amherst College in Amherst, Mass., started a fire in a residence that had been converted into student housing. According to fire officials, the fire started in a second-floor room that was unoccupied at the  
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time of the fire. A halogen lamp fell over and ignited combustibles in the area. The building's fire alarm system was activated, and an occupant from another

room discovered the fire. He unsuccessfully attempted to extinguish the fire using a dry chemical fire extinguisher. Smoke and heat damage was limited to the room of origin. Halogen lamps are banned by Amherst College.

- On Jan. 19, 2000, a fire occurred at a Seton Hall University dorm. Three male freshmen, all 18 years old, died. Fifty-four students, two South Orange fire fighters, and two South Orange police officers were injured. The dormitory was a six-story, 350-room structure built in 1952, which housed about 600 students. It was equipped with smoke alarms but no fire sprinkler system.
- On Mother's Day in 1996 in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, a fire in the Phi Gamma Delta Fraternity house killed five college juniors and injured three. The three-story plus basement house was 70 years old. The National Fire Protection Association identified several factors that contributed to the tragic fire, including the lack of fire sprinkler protection.

*Source: Examples listed in the congressional findings for the College Fire Prevention Act, a bill that encourages the installation of a fire sprinkler system in student housing and dormitories and the Center for Campus Safety. For more information, please go to [www.asse.org/newsroom](http://www.asse.org/newsroom) or contact Diane Hurns at [dhurns@asse.org](mailto:dhurns@asse.org), Rennie Heath at [rheath@asse.org](mailto:rheath@asse.org) or ASSE customer service at [customerservice@asse.org](mailto:customerservice@asse.org) or 847-699-2929.*