

DORM SAFE 101

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TV



THE BASICS OF CAMPUS LIVING

Each year, students leave the comfort and security of their family home to set up residence in one of our nation's many colleges and universities. This is a time for great excitement and independence — and a little trepidation for parents. They want to know their children are safe, even when they're not there to watch over them.

Before sending your students off to college, be sure they know the basics of safety when it comes to living on their own. You won't be there to make sure they turn the burners off after cooking, so this is a lesson they must learn — and hopefully not the hard way.

Fire safety unplugged

According to *Campus Firewatch*, a monthly electronic newsletter focusing on fire safety issues at colleges and universities, during the last three years 52 students died in fires while attending college, and 80 percent of fire fatalities occurred off campus. Careless smoking, unattended candles and cooking, and overloaded extension cords and power outlets are among the most common causes of fires in student residences.

"A lot of unnecessary deaths, injuries and property loss can be avoided by following some simple rules," said Michael G. Clendenin, executive director of the Rosslyn, VA-based Electrical Safety Foundation International. "This is particularly important for new college students living on their own for the first time, in old buildings with old electrical systems. They'll be bringing with them computers, stereos, hot plates, microwaves, small refrigerators, fans, heaters, lamps, cell phone chargers and a host of other electrical items — all destined for the same outlet."

ESFI suggests some simple safety rules for the college bound:

- Never run power cords across traffic paths or under rugs or furniture.
- Never tack or nail an electrical cord to any surface.
- Never use extension cords on a continuous basis; they are temporary solutions.
- Limit the energy you are demanding of the circuit when using multiple receptacle power strips and surge protectors.
- Many universities now ban halogen and floor lamps due to fire risks; replace them with more efficient, cooler burning fluorescent lamps.

Plan an escape route

If tragedy does strike after taking all these precautions, students need to be ready. It's a good idea to have an escape plan drawn up; students should check with their resident advisor if they're living in a dorm to find out the school's escape plan for their particular residence hall.

Two exits should be clearly identified close to their room. It should be assumed that the first area of escape may be blocked. It's a good idea to memorize the number of doors to the nearest exit. Chances are good that when students do exit their room in the event of a fire, they may have to crawl to safety and their vision may be impaired.

Students also should be instructed to never tamper with smoke alarms. They are installed for a purpose — to keep them and their roommates safe.

Top causes of dormitory fires versus residential structure fires

(3-year average, National Fire Incident Reporting System data 1996-98)

Incendiary/suspicious	33%
Cooking	21%
Smoking	14%

Source: U.S. Fire Administration, 2001

According to Ed Comeau, director of the Center for Campus Fire Safety, Belchertown, MA, in the event of a fire students should know exactly what their college requires and what procedures are in place for evacuating the residence halls. Two of the simplest and most important things to remember is when a fire alarm sounds, get out. If it's not safe to get out, close and seal the door with wet towels and call 911 to report the residence hall is on fire.

Students should never risk trying to get out if it is unsafe. Many fatalities occur when people try to get out of fires on their own. "Students should understand that this is not an absolute solution," said Comeau. "Students should be completely aware of their school's evacuation policy and follow it for their safety."

'Loft'y ambitions

College students often like to maximize the space in their rooms by using loft beds or building lofts for existing beds. Some colleges ban this type of furniture due to its hampering of fire suppression systems. Before your student builds this type of structure in his or her dorm room, check the college's policy to be sure there aren't any safety restrictions.

The same holds true for any furniture he or she might be bringing from home. Some colleges and universities prefer to provide students living in residence halls with school-approved furniture in lieu of students bringing their own. This also is done for safety reasons and students should check with their school before loading up the car.

Crime prevention

When living in residence halls and apartment complexes where students may feel familiar with other residents, it's common to let their guard down. They may not assume their "friends" would steal from them or cause them physical harm, but one can never be too sure who they might have as guests in their rooms. Students

Steps to keep your

Living on your own for the first time, in your own space can be exciting. You may be tempted to pile as many of your personal belongings into your dorm space as possible. However, that's not always the best plan. Follow your college or university's rules regarding what to bring from home and what to leave behind and pay attention to policies regarding electricity and small appliances.

Doors

Lock doors when you are away from your room or in your room alone. Never prop open doors to suites or residence halls or tamper with locking devices in any way.



Smoking

Smoking is not permitted in residence halls. Check your university's policies on smoking areas on campus.

Cleaning

You are expected to keep your room up to safety and cleanliness standards. The university will take care of cleaning common areas such as restrooms and lounges. However, you and your roommate are responsible for your own space. Bring household cleaners and delegate which of you will handle which jobs.

Bedding

You are usually required to bring your own bedding and pillows. Check with the university to see if there are any specific requirements on the type of bedding you purchase.



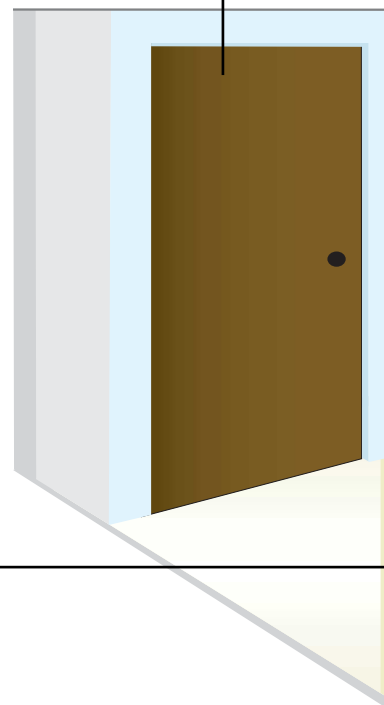
Items banned from most university residence halls due to safety hazards.

should always keep their safety and the safety of their roommates in mind when leaving their rooms.

Burglary is an unfortunate occurrence in communal living situations. Students must protect themselves by following a few simple rules provided by the University of California, Irvine, Police Department:

- Lock windows while away, especially if living on the ground floor.

- Do not loan keys to anyone, even friends.
- Always lock the room while away, even to go to the restroom.
- Lock doors while inside the room for personal safety.
- Do not prop open suite or residence doors. Meet visitors at the door.
- Do not tamper with door locking mechanisms. Never use tape or pins to keep the door from locking shut.



dorm room safe

Small refrigerators

Small refrigerators are usually expected to be no larger than 4.3 cubic feet or 3 amps. Refrigerators should be plugged directly into the wall outlet or a power strip.

Electrical appliances

Electrical appliances such as toasters and electric skillets are generally not permitted in residence halls. The same holds true for any electrical appliance with an exposed heating element or rated higher than 6 amps. All appliances should be UL approved.

Extension cords

Extension cords should never be used as a long-term solution. They are usually permitted in rooms if they are less than 6 feet long, are UL approved and not placed beneath furniture or carpeting. They also should not be tacked or nailed to any surface.

Windows

Lock windows when you are away from your room or in your room alone.

Halogen lamps

Halogen lamps are banned in most residence halls due to their tendency to overheat.

Computers

Computers should be plugged into a surge protector that is plugged directly into the wall.

Furniture

Universities may prefer you don't bring any furniture from home. Check the policies before loading the car. You will usually be provided the basics.

Candles

For fire safety, candles are usually not permitted in residence halls. The same holds true for incense burners or potpourri pots.

- Avoid leaving messages on doors describing departure or returning times.
 - Do not leave large sums of money, jewelry or valuables in rooms.
 - Refrain from leaving valuables unattended in backpacks or laptops in communal areas.
 - Report lost or stolen keys immediately.
 - Be mindful of visitors in the room. Do not allow strangers into rooms.
 - Report suspicious people, including door-to-door salespeople.
- Carmen Hoppenjan, director of residential life at Augustana College in Rock Island, IL, said the key to keeping students safe on campus is simple: "Give them good information prior to coming to campus and have a good proactive and reactive approach [to safety education]."

For more information

- 🖱 The Center for Campus Fire Safety
www.campusfire.org
- 🖱 Electrical Safety Foundation International
www.electrical-safety.org
- 🖱 National Safety Council
www.nsc.org