



PUBLIC SAFETY BULLETIN

For Immediate Release
August 27, 2007

Office of the Fire Commissioner
BC Coroners Service

STUDENT FIRE SAFETY CAN PREVENT NEEDLESS DEATHS

VICTORIA – As post secondary students head back to universities and colleges across the province, the Office of the Fire Commissioner and the BC Coroners Service are urging students to protect themselves and their friends from fire.

“We see the devastation fires cause first hand,” said Chief Coroner Terry Smith. “Public education is the key to preventing fire related deaths. It’s not enough to talk about safety tips; they need to be practiced.”

There were over 7200 residential fires reported in the province last year and five young adults between the ages of 17 and 24 died.

Every year in BC young adults experience fire-related emergencies. Many are due to a general lack of knowledge about fire safety and prevention. Smokers’ materials, cooking, candles and electrical short circuits are major causes of residential fires in the province. Educating college and university students about the importance of day-to-day fire safety and prevention measures in residences and off-campus housing can help reduce loss of life and property.

Fire safety in their residence or apartment should be part of every student’s checklist when they head off to university or college. “Students need to make sure that their living accommodation has smoke alarms as well as fire extinguishers. These inexpensive products could be the difference between life and death,” says Acting Fire Commissioner, Richard Simpson.

The Office of the Fire Commissioner and the BC Coroners Service work with partner agencies as well as and municipal governments to provide safety information to the public. For additional safety tips and information, visit: The Office of the Fire Commissioner: www.pssg.gov.bc.ca/firecom

See next page for fire safety tips for students.

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Contact: Paula Webber
Communications Officer
250.387.1476

Terry Foster
Public Affairs Officer
604.660.7752

THE BASICS OF FIRE SAFETY FOR STUDENTS

Cooking

Cooking is a major cause of home fires in BC. If your accommodation has cooking facilities, there are some basic fire safety rules to follow to prevent cooking fires:

- A stovetop fire can start in a flash, so stay in the kitchen when something is cooking on the stove or in the microwave.
- Keep all combustible items a safe distance away from the stove. This includes tea towels, wooden or plastic spoons and paper towels.
- Keep a pot lid near the stove to smother flames if a fire starts in a pot.

Social Gatherings

While most student parties are harmless fun, the consumption of alcohol combined with cooking or smoking can create a serious fire risk. To minimize fire risk during or after parties:

- Avoid over-crowding. The more people attending the party, the easier it is to lose control of the situation.
- Encourage guests to smoke outside. Consider putting up no smoking signs that direct guests to an outside smoking area.
- Refrain from burning candles during parties. They can easily be knocked over or ignite nearby combustibles, unnoticed.

Smoking

Even if you don't smoke, chances are you may have friends that do. To prevent smoking fires:

- Encourage smokers to go outside.
- Keep large, deep ashtrays on hand to reduce the risk of ashes and cigarette butts falling onto rugs or upholstery.
- Allow ashes to cool completely before disposing.

Electrical Equipment

Overloaded circuits and octopus wiring are dangerous electrical hazards that can be avoided. To prevent fires caused by electrical equipment:

- Use a ULC-listed power bar with a circuit breaker and surge protector to plug in computer and stereo equipment.
- Avoid the use of extension cords as permanent wiring.
- Make sure electrical cords are not concealed under carpets or rugs where they can be easily damaged.

Candles

Candles are becoming more and more popular, especially among young people. To prevent candle fires:

- Always use non-combustible containers for tea lights and candles, or consider using a hurricane lamp.
- Place the candles in a location where they can't be knocked over or come in contact with combustible items, such as curtains.
- Blow out all candles before leaving the room or going to bed.

Smoke alarms

It is critical that the dwelling have working smoke alarms if a fire does occur, to alert you as soon as possible.

- The responsibility for smoke alarm installation and maintenance lies with the homeowner or landlord, however it is a good idea for parents to provide their child with a smoke alarm for his or her bedroom.
- It is against the law for anyone to disable or tamper with a smoke alarm.
- If a smoke alarm activates due to steam from the shower or cooking on the stove, oven or toaster, ask the landlord to move the alarm to a different location, or to install a smoke alarm with a pause feature.

Fire Escape Planning

When the smoke alarm sounds, everyone must know what to do and where to go. Develop a fire escape plan, keeping the following in mind:

- Know two ways out of every room, if possible. The first way out would be the door while the alternate escape could be a window that can be exited safely. Make sure all designated escape routes are accessible and free of clutter.
- Leave the building as quickly as possible. Once outside, don't re-enter the building for any reason.
- Call 9-1-1 from outside the building using a cell phone or neighbours' phone.