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ROD R. BLAGOJEVICH - GOVERNOR

NEWS

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Gov. Blagojevich proclaims September as "Campus Fire Safety Month"
State offers tips to prevent college residence fires

SPRINGFIELD – As students settle back into their daily routines at colleges and universities throughout Illinois, Governor Rod R. Blagojevich today urged educators to teach students about fire dangers and simple steps they can take to stay safe in on- and off-campus housing.

Smoking in college dorms, as well as sorority and fraternity houses that are owned and operated by a university, is prohibited in Illinois under a measure signed this spring by Gov. Blagojevich. In addition, the Governor signed legislation in August 2004 requiring dormitories at all public and private colleges and universities in Illinois to have fire sprinkler systems installed in new and existing dorms by 2013.

In the past six years, nearly 90 people have died as a result of on- and off-campus fires and hundred more have been injured, according to the Center for Campus Fire Safety, a nonprofit organization dedicated to prevent campus-related fire issues. August and September are two of the deadliest months for these fires and almost 80% of the deaths take place in off-campus apartments or homes, which is where three-fourths of college students live.

“Many fires in college residences are preventable with just a little knowledge and some common sense,” said Dave Foreman, Illinois’ State Fire Marshal. “College is an exciting time of life for students, a time when they have a whole lifetime of possibilities ahead of them. We don’t want that cut short by tragic fire.”

Many fatal fires involving college students have four common elements: missing or disabled smoke alarms, careless disposal of smoking materials, alcohol consumption, and lack of automatic sprinkler systems.

“I want to thank Governor Rod Blagojevich for signing this proclamation that makes September, the beginning of the academic year, Campus Fire Safety Month,” said Richard Herman, Chancellor, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. “During check-in last week we worked with local fire departments to emphasize the importance of fire safety to incoming students. We will sponsor a one-day community-wide event called ‘Fire Factor’ at the University of Illinois Fire Service Institute to train student leaders on fire safety. Through our investments the University is insuring that it meets twenty-first century fire safety standards.”

Carelessly disposed of cigarettes are the leading causes of fatal fires in all residences, including rental properties where college students may live, according to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA). Fires started by open flames, such as a candle, are also a major cause of fatal campus fires.

Alcohol consumption contributes to fire deaths because it decreases inhibition and impairs judgment, which can increase a student’s risk of not waking to the sound of a smoke alarm and perhaps not surviving a fire. The NFPA also found that more than 60 percent of adults killed or injured in smoking material residential fires were either asleep or possibly impaired by alcohol. In addition, the NFPA says that while most homes and apartments, including rental properties, have smoke alarms, nearly 40 percent don’t work, often due to dead or missing batteries.

“This proclamation clearly underscores the need to address the problem of campus fire safety and a commitment to work towards a solution,” said George K. Michehl, executive director of the Illinois Fire Inspectors Association. “We look forward to the day that all campus housing, both on and off campus, is protected by both smoke detectors and automatic fire sprinkler systems.”

Tips for staying safe in on- and off-campus housing

- Install UL-listed smoke alarms in every room of an apartment or rental home. Battery-powered wireless smoke alarm use radio frequency technology to link together so that when one alarm sounds, all of the alarms sound. This immediate response helps provide early warning no matter where the fire starts, giving more time to escape.
- Test smoke alarms monthly and replace batteries as needed.
- Look for housing that is equipped with automatic fire sprinkler systems. Not every residence hall or rental property has them.
- Know two ways out of every building. A fire escape ladder can provide an alternate exit from second or third floor rooms.
- Properly dispose of smoking materials in ashtrays. After parties, check the cushions on couches and chairs for smoldering cigarettes.
- Purchase a fire extinguisher and learn how to use it before a fire breaks out. **Always notify the fire department before attempting to extinguish a fire on your own.**
- Use UL-listed extension cords and electrical appliances properly. Don't overload electrical outlets.
- If the residence has fossil-fuel burning appliances, such as a gas stove or furnace, install UL-listed carbon monoxide alarms on every floor and near sleeping areas. Beginning January 1, 2007, all residences in Illinois will be required to have a CO detector within 15 feet of any sleeping area under a new law signed this spring by Gov. Blagojevich.
- Never leave candles unattended and keep them away from items that could easily catch fire. Be sure to put out candles before going to bed.

The text of the Governor's proclamation follows:

SEPTEMBER 2006 CAMPUS FIRE SAFETY MONTH PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, fire education and prevention is vital to ensuring the safety of Americans and Illinoisans; and

WHEREAS, college students living on their own for the first time are particularly susceptible to the danger posed by fires; and

WHEREAS, since January of 2000, more than 88 children, students, and parents throughout the country have died in student housing fires, and almost 80 percent of those deaths occurred in off-campus occupancies where the majority of students live unsupervised; and

WHEREAS, most fires can be avoided by practicing some simple commonsense behaviors and routines, such as: checking and turning off the oven and stove before going to sleep or leaving home, not overloading electrical circuits, safely stowing all dangerous and hazardous materials, keeping any electrical devices clear of water, checking and maintaining alarm and sprinkler systems, and noting the location of fire extinguishers to use in the event of an emergency; and

WHEREAS, education significantly helps minimize the risk of fire by raising awareness of those behaviors and routines, but many students do not receive effective fire safety

education during their college career when they are generally most at risk:

THEREFORE, I, Rod R. Blagojevich, Governor of the State of Illinois, do hereby proclaim September 2006 as **CAMPUS FIRE SAFETY MONTH** in Illinois to encourage educators to provide educational programs on the dangers and prevention of fire as students begin and return to college.
