

Fire Safety Basics for Student Accommodation



When young people attend college or university, they will often be living away from home for the first time. This can be a concern for parents as they try to ensure their children will be safe when they're not living under the same roof. The following is important fire safety information that every student should know before moving away from home. Parents should discuss these basic fire safety rules with their kids before dropping them off at their new dwelling.

Cooking

Cooking is the number one cause of home fires in Ontario. If the student's accommodation has cooking facilities, there are some basic fire safety rules they must 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.
- 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.

Space Heaters

The central heating systems in older accommodation is often supplemented with space heaters. To prevent heating fires:

- Keep the space heater at least one metre away from anything that can burn, such as paper, bedding, furniture and curtains.
- Turn off the space heater before going out or going to bed.

Candles

The use of candles is becoming more and more popular, especially among young people. To prevent candle fires:

- Use tea lights or votive candles in non-combustible containers as they are generally a safer choice than tapers.
- Place the candles in a location where they can't be knocked over or come in contact with combustible items.
- Blow out all candles before leaving the room or going to bed.

Social Gatherings

Parties are as much a part of student life as attending classes. While most student parties are harmless fun, the consumption of alcohol combined with cooking or smoking can create a serious fire risk. To minimize the risk of fires 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

Fires caused by smoking can be deadly. Even if they don't smoke themselves, chances are the student will have friends that do. To prevent smoking fires:

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

Smoke alarms

If a fire does occur, it is critical that the dwelling have working smoke alarms to alert occupants 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 tenants 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.

Electrical Equipment

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

- Use an approved 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.

Fire Escape Planning

When the smoke alarm sounds, everyone must know what to do and where to go. Encourage students to 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.