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For immediate release

Fire safety is a key lesson for college students

One place that may be overlooked during National Fire Prevention Week (Oct. 5 to Oct. 11) is the college student's off-campus home.

"Fire safety and prevention might be one of the last things on the minds of students who have come back into town, but it's one of the most important," says Karla Klas, RN, Injury Prevention Nurse, at the University of Michigan Trauma Burn Center.

"College students can be at more risk for fires occurring since it's the first time they are out of the nest and are responsible for independently maintaining the safety of the place they live. Every year preventable fires happen and they don't need to—if students have prevention knowledge and use common sense."

"Fire causes include cooking, unattended candles, overloaded electrical circuits and extension cords, and smoking," she said. "A smoke detector makes all of the difference in getting out uninjured. This may be the first time it's the student's responsibility to think about checking smoke alarms and changing batteries, but it's part of being an adult."

According to the U.S. Fire Administration, most student fire deaths occur in off-campus housing that has insufficient exits and missing or inoperative smoke alarms and automatic fire sprinklers. Also, use of candles, careless smoking habits, and the misuse of alcohol – which impairs judgment and hampers evacuation efforts – contribute to off-campus housing fire deaths. There is a strong link between alcohol and fire deaths. In more than 50 percent of adult fire fatalities, victims were under the influence at the time of the fire.

Here are some suggestions for students to remember:

Candles

- Do not leave candles unattended.
- Keep candles away from draperies and linens.

Cooking

- Cook only where it is permitted.
- Keep your cooking area clean and uncluttered.
- Never leave cooking unattended.
- If a fire starts in a microwave, keep the door closed and unplug the unit.
- If you use electric appliances, do not overload circuits.

Smoking

- If you must smoke, only smoke outside of the building.
- Use deep, wide, sturdy ashtrays. Ashtrays should be set on something sturdy and hard to ignite.
- It is risky to smoke when you've been drinking or are drowsy.
- NEVER smoke in bed.
- Soak cigarettes before emptying an ashtray.
- After a party, check furniture and cushions for smoldering butts.

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Escape Planning

- If you have to escape through smoke, get low and crawl under the smoke to your exit.
- Before opening a door, feel the door. If it's hot, use your second way out.
- Use the stairs; never use an elevator during a fire.
- If you're trapped, call the fire department and tell them where you are. Seal your door with rags and signal from your window. Open windows slightly at the top and bottom; shut them if smoke rushes in from any direction.
- If you have a disability, alert others of the type of assistance you need to leave the building.

Source: National Fire Prevention Association (NFPA)

The University of Michigan Hospital Trauma Burn Center (TBC) is an internationally recognized leader in patient care, research and rehabilitation. The TBC is verified as both a Burn Center and a Level-1 Trauma Center. Its programs address preventable injuries to children, adolescents and adults as well as the medical and social consequences of injury and disability. The TBC is committed to community education on prevention, consequences and treatment of traumatic injury.

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