

College Dorm Fire Safety

By Nydia Han

September 15, 2005 - Fire safety may not be a high priority when parents send their children off to college, but perhaps it should be.

Since January 2000, 75 people have lost their lives in student housing fires. And most, if not all the fires, were preventable. A fire killed three students at Seton Hall University more than five years ago. But to Dana Christmas it seems like yesterday. Dana Christmas/Fire Victim: "I scream out the window. 'It's a fire, it's a fire. Everyone get up!'"

But despite Dana's efforts - many students ignored the alarm. Fifty-eight students were injured, including Dana. She is now dedicating her life to encouraging others to take fire safety seriously.

"I wouldn't want anyone else to go through what I went through." A look at a dormitory blaze simulated by Underwriters Laboratories shows just how quickly a fire can spread. It takes just minutes for a spark to ignite and the entire room to be engulfed in flames. "We're going to be going to one of our residences. It's called Hamilton House."

The University of Pennsylvania is spending thirty-million-dollars on safety upgrades for all student housing facilities. Now each dorm has smoke alarms and automatic sprinkler systems.

Maureen Rush/UPenn Public Safety: "All right. This is the fire control center. This is for the Philadelphia fire department as well as our fire safety department." "And we do fire drills, or evacuation drills as they're called, four times a year in this building and all residences."

New Jersey and Delaware have state laws requiring sprinkler systems in student housing. Pennsylvania does not. John Drengenberg/Underwriters Laboratories: "So the thing you've gotta remember is when the alarm sounds you have to respond to it. You can't assume it's a prank or a drill."

"You've got to find where the exits are. You should know at least two exits." Not only that, you want to count the number of doors from your room to the exit so if it's dark, all you have to do is run your fingers along the wall, count the doors, and exit and you're out and safe.

To look up your school's fire safety rating visit www.princetonreview.com. Enter the name of the school in the search box on the left-hand side of the screen. On the next page, click on the name of the school about which you want information. Then click on "Campus Life" under the "Statistics" section. You will have to register to access the information. Registration is free.