

National Campus Fire Safety Month starts today

Since 2000, 135 people have died in campus-related fires

BELCHERTOWN, Mass., September 1, 2009 — This year marks the fifth anniversary of National Campus Fire Safety Month with the goal of having more schools, communities, students and parents aware of the dangers of fire and engaged in learning what they can do to make sure tragedy does not strike. Since 2000, at least 135 people have died in campus related fires with over 80 percent of them occurring in off-campus housing according to information compiled by Campus Firewatch.

"I think we see so many fire deaths in off-campus housing for several reasons," said Ed Comeau, publisher of Campus Firewatch and a long-time advocate for campus fire safety. "This is where almost two-thirds of the students across the country live. Also, the buildings tend to be older, unsprinklered and may be missing smoke alarms. There are also fewer rules regarding activities such as smoking and candles and there is more alcohol consumption taking place. All of these are contributing factors to fatal fires that have occurred over the years."

To help combat this and raise national awareness, Campus Firewatch has teamed up with the Ohio Fire Safety Coalition, the Congressional Fire Services Institute and the University of North Carolina to hold an event on Capitol Hill in Washington, DC on September 17 with Congressional co-sponsors Senators Frank Lautenberg and Susan Collins and Representatives Bill Pascrell and Joe Wilson. A contingent of students, parents who have lost children, fire officials and advocates will be joining together with Members of Congress for a press conference and then meetings on Capitol Hill.

In addition to the launch, schools across the country are holding educational events to teach students what they can do to prevent a fire from occurring and what to do if one should break out. To drive the message home in a dramatic way, some schools are building mockups of student rooms in the middle of campus and setting them on fire. Others are taking advantage of an innovative online education program www.igot2kno.org that was developed under a Department of Homeland Security Grant that shows students the fateful impact of seemingly simple actions.

Using today's social networks, Campus Firewatch has launched an awareness campaign using Twitter. Running until September 3, fire safety messages are being sent out on the Campus Firewatch Twitter ([@campusfirewatch](https://twitter.com/campusfirewatch)) account and the person that forwards them on, or re-tweets, the most will win an iPod Touch. As of August 31, over 30,000 people had received fire safety messages in less than four days.

"Students have many choices to make when they go off to college," said Gail Minger, a fire safety advocate who lost her son in a residence hall arson fire at Murray State University. "One of them has to be about fire safety. What may seem like a simple thing, such as taking the batteries out of a smoke alarm, may have fatal consequences. For parents, looking for housing that includes automatic fire sprinklers can give you peace of mind when it comes to fire safety."

More information on National Campus Fire Safety Month can be found at www.CampusFireSafetyMonth.org.

Educational resources and information are available for download at www.campus-firewatch.com.

MEDIA AVAILABILITY: Ed Comeau, manager of National Campus Fire Safety Month and publisher of Campus Firewatch, can be reached at 413-323-6002 (office), 413-896-5718 (cell) or via email at ecomeau@campus-firewatch.com, to discuss current trends and challenges facing fire safety on college campuses. Mr. Comeau is the former chief fire investigator for the National Fire Protection Association where he investigated a number of significant incidents, including the English Channel Tunnel Fire, the Kobe Earthquake, the D^{üsseldorf} Airport Terminal Fire, the Gothenburg Disco Fire and the Oklahoma City Bombing.

Campus Firewatch is a social enterprise focusing on campus fire safety. For more information, visit our website at www.campus-firewatch.com.

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