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## **Campus Fire Safety; A Top Priority for Students Living in On and Off-Campus Housing**

*94 percent of fatal campus fires between 2000-2015 took place in off-campus housing*

Springfield, Ill- September is Campus Fire Safety Month and Illinois joins numerous states across the country to raise awareness of fire safety in on and off-campus housing. Governor JB Pritzker has again this year proclaimed September as Campus Fire Safety Month in Illinois. This month is a time for universities and colleges to work with their local fire departments to ensure students reside in a fire-safe living environment and are provided fire safety information.

College is often the first time many young people are living away from home, meaning it's more important than ever for them to understand how to create and practice a fire safety escape plan. Having working smoke alarms, sprinkled residential dwellings, and other fire safety plans in place can create a safe living environment.

"Fire safety should always be a top priority no matter if the student is living at home or residing in on or off campus housing. I want to stress to parents the importance of inspecting the apartment or house your student is moving into and making sure they have working smoke alarms," **said Illinois State Fire Marshal James A. Rivera.** "Take a few minutes with your child and talk about a fire escape plan in their new residence and find two ways out of every room. By spending a few minutes going over fire safety in their new home, it will help to make you rest easier knowing they are prepared and protected."

The goal of this month is to create educational opportunities for students to learn the importance of fire safety, ultimately leading to the reduced risk for fires and or death related to on and off campus fires. According to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), September and October are the peak months for fires in dormitory properties, with cooking being the main cause of these fires. Fires most commonly occur during the evening hours. According to data from the Center for Campus Fire Safety, from January 2000 to April 2022, 94 fatal fires have been documented that occurred on a college campus, in Greek housing, or in off-campus housing within three miles of the campus and claimed 134 lives. An astonishing 94 percent of fatal campus fires examined took place in off-campus housing, with 7 fatalities occurring here in Illinois since 2000.

At Millikin University, located in Decatur, Ill., fire safety takes center stage during the annual Nick Project events on campus which provide fire safety equipment to Millikin's fraternities, sororities and off-campus students. The Nick Project was started by Millikin alum Sophia Schwalbach, Class

of 2019, in the fall of 2015. Sophia was only four years old when her brother, Nick Schwalbach, lost his life in a fraternity house fire on Millikin's campus in June 2000 and she has dedicated her life to preventing another tragedy.

“Fire safety is a top priority for the students at Millikin, whether they live on or off campus. Each year, Sophia Schwalbach and Millikin’s Office of Student Affairs provides the tools for students to reduce the danger of a fire emergency and make the campus safer,” **Millikin President Jim Reynolds said.** “I would also like to thank Illinois Governor JB Pritzker and Illinois State Fire Marshal James A. Rivera for their continued leadership in keeping the students of Illinois’ colleges and universities prepared for a fire emergency through Campus Fire Safety Month.”

Quote from Millikin University President

Here are some fire safety tips and ways to help keep students safe when choosing a residence:

- Look for housing whether on or off campus that is outfitted with working sprinklers.
- Make sure you can hear the building’s fire alarm system.
- Check to make sure all sleeping rooms and common areas have functioning smoke alarms. For optimal protection, all smoke alarms in the home should be interconnected so that when one sounds, they all sound.
- Never remove batteries or disable or cover any alarm device.
- Test all smoke alarms at least monthly.
- Whether you live on or off campus, have a fire escape plan with two ways out of every room.
- Learn the building’s evacuation plan and practice all drills as if they were the real thing.
- When the smoke alarm or CO alarm sounds, exit the building quickly and stay out until given instructions to return.
- If you smoke, smoke outside and only in designated areas.
- Dispose of used smoking materials in proper receptacles.
- Never leave the kitchen when cooking.
- Check with your local fire department, building management, or campus office before using a barbeque grill or fire pit.
- Never overload electrical outlets and check with the school to make sure what electrical appliances are allowed.

More campus fire safety information can be found by visiting OSFM’s website.

Governor Pritzker’s Proclamation is attached.

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