

Send your student to college with all the essentials - including electrical safety knowledge!

September is National Campus Fire Safety Month

Sending a child off to college can be a stressful time for parents – making sure their student has all the essentials to help prepare for a bright future. While shopping for the typical supplies to make new surroundings home-like and comfortable, give those students a bit of TLC: teach them about electrical safety and encourage them to share it with others.

Often-times students innocently plug in all of the college tools – study lamps, laptops, TV's, stereos, grooming and other electrical devices – unaware of the potential dangers. BECi urges parents to make sure your student is educated on safe appliance use, precautions against overloading outlets and other potential electrical hazards.

In its most recent report, the National Fire Protection Association estimates that US fire departments respond to an average of 3,570 fires in dormitories, fraternities, sororities and barracks each year. The tragic results: an average of seven deaths, 54 injuries and nearly \$30 million in direct property damage per year.

The limited number of electric outlets in student rooms can tempt many to use multiple extension cords and power strips, which can cause cords to overheat, creating shock and fire hazards. Student residences crammed with books, papers and bedding can allow the smallest spark to quickly become a blaze.

Safety steps to prevent and reduce the risk of electrical fires in student housing include:

- Purchase and use only UL-rated electrical appliances and power cords.
- Avoid overloading extension cords, power strips or outlets.
- Use extension cords only on a temporary basis; they are not intended as permanent solutions.
- Use power strips with an over-current protector that will shut off power automatically if there is too much current being drawn.
- Never tack or nail an electrical cord to any surface, or run cords across traffic paths or under rugs where they can be trampled or damaged.
- Use the correct wattage light bulbs for lamps and fixtures. If no indication is on the product, do not use a bulb with more than 60 watts. And use cooler, compact fluorescent lamps (CFLs) when possible.
- Keep all electrical appliances and cords safely away from bedding, curtains, papers and other flammable material.
- Make sure outlets around sinks are equipped with ground fault circuit interrupters (GFCIs) before use.
- Unplug small appliances when not in use and all electronics when away for extended periods.

Older wiring in student housing and apartments may not be able to handle the increased electrical demand of today's college student. If use of an appliance frequently causes power to trip off, or if its power cord or the outlet feels hot, the appliance should be disconnected immediately and the condition reported to the landlord or campus housing staff.

A fire escape plan is essential for every student. Whether apartment and dorm residents, make sure they know evacuation procedures and emergency exit locations in the event of a fire.

Emphasize to students that smoke detectors should never be disabled, nor should fire alarms ever be ignored or taken casually as a drill. If a fire alarm sounds, residents should calmly and quickly follow practiced procedures and immediately exit the building. Apartment and dorm doors should be closed behind to prevent the spread of fire.

Stress to students that in the event of a fire, follow safety procedures and get out of harm's way immediately, property and valuables can be replaced, but lives cannot.

For more fire and electrical safety information, visit www.SafeElectricity.org.

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For more information and videos on electrical safety, visit www.SafeElectricity.org. Safe Electricity is a program of the Energy Education Council, a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting electrical safety and energy efficiency, and supported by a coalition of hundreds of organizations, including electric utilities, educators and other entities committed to promoting safe use of electricity.