

## Cooking

*Cooking is the number one cause of home fires in B.C. If your accommodation has cooking facilities, there are some basic fire safety rules to follow to prevent cooking fires:*

- A stovetop fire can start in a flash, so stay in the kitchen when something is cooking on the stove.
- Keep all combustible items a safe distance away from the stove. This includes tea towels, wooden or plastic spoons and paper towels.
- Keep a pot lid near the stove to smother flames if a fire starts in a pot.

## Alcohol

The consumption of alcohol combined with smoking or cooking can lead to tragic results. Alcohol can impair your judgment and reduce your ability to react in a fire emergency.

## Candles

*The popularity of candles has increased dramatically over the past number of years and so has the number of fires caused by candles. To prevent candle fires:*

- Use tea lights or votive candles in non-combustible containers as they are generally a safer choice than tapers.
- Place the candles in a location where they can't be knocked over or come in contact with combustible items.
- Blow out all candles before leaving the room or going to bed.

## Smoking

*Fires caused by smoking can be deadly. Even if you don't smoke yourself, chances are you will have friends that do. To prevent smoking fires:*

- Encourage smokers to go outside.
- Keep large, deep ashtrays on hand that will reduce the risk of ashes and cigarette butts falling onto rugs or upholstery.
- Allow ashes to cool completely before disposing.
- Hookah pipes should always be used outdoors and fastened to a table or other flat surface before use.

## Space Heaters

*Central heating systems in older accommodation are often supplemented with space heaters. To prevent heating fires:*

- Keep the space heater at least one metre away from anything that can burn, such as paper, bedding, furniture and curtains.
- Turn off the space heater before going out or going to bed. Better yet, use one that has an automatic shut-off feature.

## Electrical Equipment

*Overloaded circuits and octopus wiring are dangerous electrical hazards that can be avoided. To prevent fires caused by electrical equipment:*

- Use an approved power bar with a circuit breaker and surge protector to plug in computer and stereo equipment.
- Avoid the use of extension cords as permanent wiring.
- Make sure electrical cords are not concealed under carpets or rugs where they can be easily damaged.

## Social Gatherings

*Parties are as much a part of student life as attending classes. Most student parties are harmless fun, but the consumption of alcohol combined with cooking or smoking can create a serious fire risk. To minimize risk of fires during or after parties:*

- Avoid over-crowding. The more people attending the party, the easier it is to lose control of the situation.
- Encourage guests to smoke outside. Consider putting up "NO SMOKING" signs that direct guests to an outside smoking area.
- Refrain from burning candles during parties. They can easily be knocked over or ignite nearby combustibles, unnoticed.

**Contact your local fire department if you have questions about fire safety in your residence.**

# FIRE SAFETY BASICS FOR STUDENTS

## LIVING IN OFF-CAMPUS HOUSING





## Fire Safety Basics for Student Accommodation “Fire Safety 101”

For many students, attending college or university involves moving to a new city and searching for affordable housing. For many, this also means living away from home for the first time. While affordability may be a key issue in determining where you will live, another consideration that must be paramount for students and their families is **fire safety**.

For many students, planning ahead for fire safety may be secondary to other issues such as studying, parties and part-time work. Many young adults believe that fires are not something that will happen to them; they may not take the time to consider the potential risks of living in a home that does not comply with basic fire safety requirements.

It may be worthwhile to have the building inspected by a home inspector.

Whether living on, or off-campus, practice **“Fire Safety 101”**.



### Smoke Alarms

A working smoke alarm provides you with the earliest warning of a fire, but only if it is properly installed and maintained.

Consider smoke alarms with a “hush” feature. They are a good choice, especially if installed near a kitchen or bathroom. This feature silences the smoke alarm for several minutes and resets itself. Photoelectric smoke alarms may be less prone to nuisance alarms caused by cooking activities.

**WARNING: Disabling a smoke alarm by removing batteries, disconnecting wires or covering the smoke alarm will leave you unprotected!**

**TEST** your smoke alarms monthly. Correct any problems with your smoke alarm immediately.

It is also recommended that you install a carbon monoxide detector outside sleeping areas in your residence. Consider purchasing your own if it’s not provided by the landlord.

### Fire Separations

You may find accommodation in an older home that has been converted to apartments or rooming houses. At the time of the conversion, a building permit should have been obtained to ensure that fire safety features such as proper exits and fire separations between units are provided. Ask the owner if the property complies with the Building Code and Fire Code and to explain the fire safety features.

### Exits

Consider how people will escape from a room or apartment in an emergency. Every room or apartment requires adequate exits to permit unobstructed escape from the building. Ask the landlord or superintendent to identify all of the designated exits.

All windows and doors should open fully and easily. Keep stairways and hallways clear –avoid using them for storage. Furniture and other obstacles can physically block exits and may fill hallways or stairways with smoke if they catch fire.



### Fire Escape Plans

In a fire emergency, everyone must know what to do and where to go. Large apartment buildings and student residence buildings may require a fire safety plan, which informs occupants about emergency procedures. Ask the building administrator or superintendent to explain procedures in the fire safety plan.

Smaller apartment buildings and houses that have been converted to apartments or lodging rooms may not have a fire safety plan. You should ensure there are two ways out of the unit. The alternate way out can be a window that can be safely exited in an emergency. Make sure all escape routes are accessible and free of clutter. If the smoke alarm sounds, leave the building as quickly as possible. Once outside, don’t re-enter the building for any reason until it has been declared safe. Call 9-1-1 from outside the building using a cell phone or neighbour’s phone.

### Security

Some property owners install bars on windows for security. This may seem appealing but it could prevent you from escaping in an emergency situation. Security bars on windows should be equipped with a quick-opening device on the inside so the bars can be removed quickly.

### Electrical Safety

Many buildings offering lodging to students are older homes that may not have upgraded wiring. Outlets in bathrooms or within one metre of the kitchen sink should be the Ground Fault Circuit Interrupter (GFCI) type. Consider the number and location of electrical outlets in the room or apartment. There should be enough outlets so that appliances such as lamps, computer equipment and stereos can be operated without the use of extension cords. If extension cords can’t be avoided, use multi-outlet power bars that are approved and provide surge protection and a circuit breaker. Make sure that electrical cords of any kind are not concealed under carpets or rugs. Avoid overloaded circuits and octopus wiring.