

COMMUNITY

Alarm neglect causing deaths

By Jim Davis
Oregon Daily Emerald

The small, square battery dangles loosely from the uncovered smoke alarm in the kitchen hallway of University student Scott Rudi's home.

Like many people, Rudi and his roommates had difficulties with a smoke alarm that was too sensitive.

"Whenever we cook food that smokes, the alarm will go off," Rudi said. "We took the cover of the alarm off and let the battery hang — it's easier to get to. It's more accessible."

"What really bothered me was it wasn't until two months after we had moved into this house that we checked the alarms out — all the batteries were dead."

This is an occurrence that Eugene Public Safety Information Director Tim Birr said is not uncommon.

"We are finding more and more incidents of homes where smoke detectors are not present or not operating," Birr said. "People are taking the batteries out or are forgetting to check the batteries."

The lack of proper care for smoke detectors, Birr said, is translating into a higher number of fatalities by fires.

In Oregon last year, the number of deaths by fire soared to 62, the highest number of such deaths since 1980.

Four people died in three fires in Eugene last year. This number alone is not startling until compared with the fire-death statistics in the 1980s.

After the mandatory installation of smoke detectors in houses in the late 1970s, fire deaths in Eugene and the state dropped dramatically. There were several years in the 1980s without a single fire death in Eugene.

In 1989, the state of Oregon set a record low of 34 fire deaths, but since that time, the fatality rate has been increasing steadily.

"It is becoming more and more apparent that it is as much a challenge for us in Public Safety to get people to maintain smoke detectors as it was for us in Safety to get the detectors installed mandatorily," Birr said.

Acting state Fire Marshal Henry Hanf believes most fire deaths were preventable, and he attributed most of the deaths to careless acts and a lack of working smoke detectors.

Hanf urges all Oregonians to install and maintain smoke detectors in every sleeping area to give an early warning if a fire occurs.

Bails for traffic infractions increase

By Susanne Steffens
Oregon Daily Emerald

Many students may soon find themselves contesting citations in court, when bails for traffic infractions increase Feb. 1.

Citations under the new rules will in many cases double. In the case of speeding, the fine for driving more than 20 miles per hour over the limit will go up from \$130 to \$180.

"It's obvious that these rules will affect the students financially, and I encourage students to obey the laws, especially bicyclists, who will quickly notice the new changes," Eugene police Sgt.

Dennis Baker said.

The Oregon Legislature decided last year that the judges have been setting relatively low minimum bails for traffic infractions, and therefore increased the minimum bail required in connection with traffic violations.

Baker, together with other police officials and the Eugene courts, is concerned about the effects of the bail increases and believes the new rules may destroy relations between the police and the citizens.

Officer Bill Jennings said the new bails are just taxes that nobody can afford, and he does

not comprehend the drastic increase.

"We don't have a reason to justify these bails. The Legislators gave these new rules, and we have no other alternative than to set the tickets," he said.

Jennings, who is a member of the traffic unit, said it's the police's mission to help the public, but believes this task now will be difficult to achieve.

Charlene Wallis, court operations supervisor, is concerned about the new bails, saying that motorists hardly can pay the existing bails.

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