

Student gets education in dangers of fire hazards

Ryan Sommer

The average freshmen's first term at school is filled with fun, new friends and an assortment of entry level classes. My freshmen year, on the other hand, has been quite different.

On my third day at school my room caught on fire because a burning candle was left unattended in my room. The fire was my fault and I have admitted guilt, but the fire could have been avoided if I would have read and known the rules in the University of Oregon Assignment Workbook, which was mailed to every incoming freshman who planned to reside in the residence halls. This workbook is filled with information on the residence halls along with two pages of policies and rules. It is the rules that are the most important.

There are 42 different rules in the workbook and all of them were made to keep the students in the residence halls safe, especially those rules pertaining to fire. There are five rules related to fire hazards and safety equipment. They are as follows:

Electrical Appliances: Extension and multi-plug adapters are prohibited. When power strips are used, surge protectors and reset buttons are required. Microwaves and appliances with open heat

sources and no thermostat control (e.g. irons, hot plates) are prohibited.

Fire Hazard Inspection: The City Fire Marshal will conduct inspections of all rooms for fire hazards once a year and will return for spot inspections once a term.

Fire Alarms and Drills: Fire drills will be held at least once each term to ensure that all residents are familiar with the alarm and the emergency building evacuation plan. Every alarm must be treated as an emergency.

Tampering: A \$50 fine will be imposed for tampering with fire alarms, smoke detectors, emergency lights or other fire equipment, and for not abiding by the instructions given by the fire inspector during fire reinspection.

Candles and Flammable Materials: Gasoline, kerosene lamps, paint, candles and other flammable materials are hazardous to the health and safety of residents and are prohibited inside the residence halls. Fuel powered motored vehicles are not permitted inside the residence halls.

For the sake of saving space, I have cut these rules down to the most important parts. I have to admit that I did not read all of the rules in the workbook, therefore I was not aware of those pertaining to candles. I have also discovered that a

majority of the students I have talked to were also unaware of the rule regarding candles. That is why I think it is important to make these rules known to those who are still unaware of them.

I also personally believe that some of the rules don't make a lot of sense. For example, I was shocked to find out that candles were prohibited in the dorm rooms, while smoking cigarettes is not. A large percentage of house fires are caused by careless smokers, yet it is okay to smoke in dorm rooms. Cigarettes are the number one cause of fires that result in death. However, candles are the number one cause of fires in dorm rooms. As you can see, both candles and cigarettes pose a very significant danger. The above statistics are exactly why candles are not allowed in dorm rooms.

I was surprised to see that so many students skimmed over the rules instead of reading them through. All of the students I talked to were unaware that candles were prohibited in the dorms. They also think that the rules should be paraphrased into their most important components so that they are not so easily overlooked. After talking to so many students, I have been led to believe that the reason for not reading these rules completely was simply because it took too

long. Yet I still believe that it is the students' responsibility to know and abide by these rules.

The fire in my room was an accident and I was very lucky that the fire was small, because if the fire had gotten out of hand a lot of people would have been in danger. My personal damages from the fire were small, a television, stereo and some cleaning bills. My roommate lost even less, mainly his CDs. Total damages amounted to about \$6,000, but it could have been a lot worse. The fire could have easily spread to another room, or for that matter, throughout the floor. Although unlikely, the fire could have engulfed the entire wing of the dorm.

But regardless of the fire's size, it still put a lot of people at risk. The smoke from the fire could have damaged or destroyed items in every room on the floor. If the fire had gotten out of control, it could have trapped students on the floors above and could have hurt or

killed someone. Not only were students at risk, but the firefighters responding to the blaze were in danger, too.

Approximately 24 out of the 40 firefighters on duty that day responded to the fire. That is over 50 percent of all firefighters on duty in Eugene at the time. This left 16 firefighters left to respond to all the calls in Eugene, putting the citizens of the city at risk as well. As you can see, what happened had the potential to harm a lot of people.

By not reading the Residence Halls Workbook, I put many people in danger and caused lots of unnecessary grief. What started out as an innocent little candle ended in a dangerous fire with the potential for great harm. It all could have been avoided if I would have taken the time to read the two pages that were created to prevent just such an accident.

Ryan Sommer is a student at the University.

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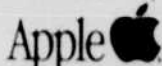
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