



Safety and Enterprise Risk Management Programs

August 2024

Campus Fire Safety Awareness and Responsibilities

General Overview

This document contains procedures and requirements also found in American University policies, directives, and other guidance documents. While this information contains a great deal of student-centric information, the general guidance and procedures are applicable to all community members.

Most fires are preventable, and all members of the university community have the responsibility to prevent fires. Everyone should be aware of the potential fire hazards on campus and ways to prevent fires. All community members should know proper emergency contact numbers and basic emergency procedures. The leading fire hazards in university buildings include improper unattended cooking, smoking materials, open flames, combustible decorations, flammable liquids, furniture, and trash.

The latest National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) statistics, show that U.S. fire departments responded to an estimated average of 3,331 structure fires each year in dormitories, fraternity houses, sorority houses, and barracks between 2018 and 2022. Fires in dormitory-type properties caused an annual average of 21 civilian deaths, 23 civilian injuries, and \$21 million in direct property damage during that period. Approximately three out of four fires in these properties began in the kitchen or cooking area, accounting for 58 percent of the civilian injuries and 11 percent of the direct property damage. Cooking equipment was involved in nearly eight out of 10 fires. (NFPA/CCFS press release)

“As students return to campus this fall, many of them will be preparing their own meals. Some will be using kitchen appliances for the first time or cooking food after studying or coming home late from a party,” said Lorraine Carli, vice president of Outreach and Advocacy at NFPA and CCFS Advisory Council member. “The data tells us that more education is needed about when and where cooking hazards exist, along with ways to prevent them...”

Flammable liquids and other hazardous chemicals are not permitted in student rooms or any storage areas. These include but are not limited to: Gasoline, ether, paint, glue, etc.

Smoking is prohibited on campus and in all residence halls. Smoking in bed is extremely dangerous and is one of the primary causes of fires in living areas. Careless disposal of matches and cigarette butts is also a common cause of fire.

Due to the high temperature emitted from halogen lamps they are prohibited in the residence halls.

Individuals can only cook in designated areas or kitchens using the proper university supplied appliances. At no time is one permitted to leave the cooking process unattended. Appliances that create a flame such as pizza ovens, heated-oil based popcorn machines, portable gas grills/cookers or any other flame-based appliance including those using Sterno type fuel are strictly prohibited unless provided/used by an approved dining services/catering provider. Cooking must be attended to at all times.

Safety tips include:

- If you are sleepy or have consumed alcohol, don't use the stove or stovetop.
- Stay in the kitchen while preparing meals; use a timer to remind you that you're cooking.
- Keep anything that can catch fire — oven mitts, wooden utensils, food packaging, towels, or curtains — away from your stovetop.

All fire alarms should be taken seriously, and all persons should follow emergency protocols on evacuation. Fire drills are required at least once each semester in residence halls.

The fire alarm system and fire-fighting equipment on campus and particularly in the residence halls are for the community's protection. Tampering with smoke detectors, sprinkler heads, sprinkler piping, alarm boxes, and fire extinguishers are strictly prohibited.

Residence hall room inspections are conducted periodically to ensure the safety of the students in our residence halls.

Additionally, possessing, charging/storage of electric scooters, hoverboards, self-balancing scooters, one-wheels, drones or other (electric or gas) personal mobility devices is prohibited in all residence halls or in any other AU owned or leased buildings or properties.

Finally, it is important to know the risks related to Lithium-Ion batteries to help prevent fires.

- Use only charging equipment that is supplied with your device.
- Do not keep charging the device or device battery after it is fully charged.
- Stop using your device if the battery shows signs of damage, such as an unusual odor, excessive heat, popping sounds, swelling, or change in color.

What You Should Do in Case of a Fire

In the event of a fire, follow the instructions below. These procedures are also located on the AU Emergency Preparedness Webpage located at [AU Emergency Preparedness Procedures](#)

Upon discovery of smoke or flames:

- Remove or notify people in danger.
- Activate the fire alarm.
- Contact AUPD at 202-885-3636 (x3636 from a campus phone) and provide them with the following information:
 - Your name
 - Exact location of the fire or emergency
 - Size and type of fire (i.e., small, large, garbage can, chemical, etc.)
- If unable to contact AUPD, dial 911.
- If you have been trained and feel capable of doing so, with another person's assistance, use a fire extinguisher to extinguish the fire.
- Evacuate the building using the nearest safe exit or stairwell. Always know at least two avenues of egress out of a building.

Upon activation of the alarm, you are expected to:

- Secure or take personal belongings (including your wallet, cell phone, and ID).
- Close all internal doors. Do not lock doors.
- Proceed in a calm, orderly manner to the nearest stairwell exit.
- Enter the stairwell, move to the right on the stairs, proceed down the stairs, and exit the building at the ground level.
- Congregate outside in the designated evacuation meeting point or other area as directed by AUPD. You may be asked to relocate to a location remote from campus.
- Keep streets, fire lanes, and walkways clear for emergency responders.
- Return to the building when permitted to do so or comply with other instructions given by AUPD.

If you are trapped inside of a building that has been evacuated:

- Call AUPD at 202-885-3636 (x3636) to report your location.
- Put an article of clothing or a towel underneath the door to block smoke from coming into the room.
- If a window is present, open the window, if possible, to signal bystanders unless fire can get into the room from a nearby location.
- Stay low to the floor where the air is less toxic.

Persons with mobility issues or who are unable to safely self-evacuate should follow this procedure:

- Call AUPD at 202-885-3636 (x3636) to notify dispatcher of your location, identifying the stairwell or closest room number.
- When sheltering in place in your room/office, you should keep your door and window closed and be in possession of a cell or office phone.

- AUPD will either contact you to give you the “all clear” or to let you know that the fire department is in route to your room to assist you with exiting the building.

If caught in smoke:

- Drop to hands and knees and crawl (if able) toward the nearest exit. Stay low; smoke will rise to ceiling level first.
- Hold your breath as much as possible. Breathe through your nose.
- Use a filter such as a shirt, towel, or other accessible items.

Clothing on fire (Stop, Drop, and Roll):

- Direct or assist a person to roll around on the floor to smother the flames.
- Drench with water if no shower is available.
- Obtain medical attention by calling AUPD at 202-885-3636 (x3636).

Overview of Prohibited Conduct Relating to Fire Safety

Students should refer to the Student Conduct Code (SCC) for prohibited conduct. The SCC is not written with the specificity of a criminal statute, nor is it intended to cover every instance of potentially prohibited conduct. American University expects its students, wherever they are, to adhere to high standards of honor and good citizenship and to conduct themselves in a responsible manner that brings credit to themselves and the university.

The following misconduct is subject to disciplinary action. Refer to *Student Conduct Code: [Student Conduct Code 2024-2025 \(american.edu\)](#)*

- Attempting to engage in any prohibited conduct.
- Conduct which threatens or endangers the health or safety of any person.
- Arson.
- Intentionally initiating or causing to be initiated any false report, warning, or threat of fire, explosion, or other emergency.
- Intentionally or recklessly interfering with normal university or university-sponsored activities, including, but not limited to, studying, teaching (including class sessions and office hours), research, university administration, or fire, police, or emergency services.
- Willfully failing to comply with the directions of university officials, including public safety officers and residence life staff members, acting in performance of their duties.
- Violations of other published non-academic university regulations or policies.

In addition, the student shall not:

- Make any material alterations in the room.
- Damage any part of such room.
- Take any actions that would constitute a fire or health hazard; and
- Permit the accumulation of waste and/or refuse within the room.

- The University maintains life safety equipment within each building it owns. This equipment includes sprinkler systems, hardwired smoke and heat detectors, fire alarm wiring, indicators and pull stations, and fire extinguishers. The student may not alter or tamper with any life safety equipment.
- Self-installed lofts, bed risers and cinderblocks are not permitted in the University Residence Halls due to safety reasons.
- Possess or store on campus or in any AU owned or leased building or property, any hoverboard, self-balancing scooter or hands-free Segway, one-wheels, drones, or any other gas powered or electrically charging mobility device.

Student Responsibility

Residents will be held responsible for damage to residence hall buildings or furniture and will be billed for repair or replacement where they have caused damage in their own rooms or in common areas. In the event of willful damage to the common areas located in the immediate vicinity of a student's room, or to the furnishings or facilities located therein, if the willful perpetrators of such damage cannot be identified, all resident students served by that common area may be assessed for repair or replacement costs.

Responsibility for Guests

Residents will be held responsible for the behavior of their guests and any other persons in their residence hall rooms, pertaining to the regulations for conduct at American University, and may be charged in lieu of the guest or visitor with violating the respective sections of these policies.

In terms of fire safety, the following is expressly prohibited:

1. To open, prop, or block fire or other exit/outside doors without the permission of a housing staff member, except during a fire alarm.
2. To sound any elevator alarm bell without due cause, or to interfere with the normal operation of elevators.
3. To set a fire inside a building or in areas contiguous to buildings.
4. To use any appliances in student rooms, on carpeted floors, in hallways, or other non-designated areas that have an external or exposed heating source, including but not limited to halogen lamps, space heaters, broiler ovens, grills, electric coffee makers, microwave ovens, hotplates, rice cookers, or electric water heating devices.
5. To place in a residence hall room any refrigerator larger than 4.5 cubic ft. in size.
6. To cook indoors with charcoal or any open flame device.
7. To possess or burn any candle or incense indoors.
8. To fail to immediately and properly evacuate the buildings when a fire alarm sounds, or to reenter any evacuated building before receiving permission from a housing or Public Safety staff member.
9. To tamper with fire equipment, or to carry or remove fire extinguishers from their mounts or storage boxes, except in case of a fire.

10. To pull or activate any fire alarm when no fire is present, or to falsely report a fire or other emergency.
11. To fail to plug electronic equipment and heat-producing appliances directly into electrical outlets and to fail to use UL-approved surge protectors/power strips for all other items requiring electricity.
12. To tamper with any smoke detector.
13. To run electrical wires beneath any rug or carpet.
14. To smoke in any residence hall.

Tampering with life safety equipment is not only prohibited by AU policy but may also be considered a violation of law and subject violators to criminal prosecution.

Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act

Consistent with the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy and Campus Crime Statistics Act, the university maintains a daily crime log and report of fire log along with filing annual reports. To view these documents, please visit this link [American University Police](#) or visit the University Safety and Security Services located in the Don Myers Building (Terrace Level entrance).

References to Information

Questions concerning these procedures can be addressed to prepared@american.edu

Useful Links

[American University Police](#)

[AU Emergency Preparedness Procedures](#)

[Student Conduct Code 2024-2025 \(american.edu\)](#)

[AU Housing License Agreement 2024-2025](#)