



Student Accommodation

A parent's guide to finding fire-safe accommodation for students attending college or university

Parents have many issues to consider when seeking suitable accommodation for a daughter or son attending college or university. The following information will help to determine if potential accommodation make the grade when it comes to fire safety.



Smoke Alarms

It is the law in Ontario to have working smoke alarms on every storey and outside all sleeping areas. The law applies to single family, semi-detached, townhomes and apartments (including basement apartments), whether owner-occupied or rented. Rooming houses have specific regulations about smoke alarms or fire alarm systems. In addition to smoke alarms within each unit or suite, apartment buildings and student residences operated by the school may also have a building fire alarm system. Make sure the landlord, administrator or superintendent identifies and explains the fire alarm and detection features in the building and unit.



Exits

It is important to consider how people will escape from a room or apartment in an emergency. Every room or apartment requires adequate exits that will permit unobstructed escape from the building. Make sure to ask the landlord or superintendent to identify all of the designated exits. All windows and doors should open fully and easily. Stairways and hallways must not be used for storage as this can pose serious fire safety hazards. Furniture and other obstacles can physically block exits and may fill hallways or stairways with smoke if they catch fire. This practice must be strictly avoided.



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 where they can be easily damaged.

Avoid overloaded circuits and octopus wiring.



Carbon Monoxide Alarms

The *Ontario Building Code* requires carbon monoxide (CO) alarms in new buildings that contain a fuel-fired appliance. However, many existing buildings were constructed prior to this requirement and may not be equipped with CO alarms. If the building has a fuel-fired (natural gas, oil, propane or wood) appliance, a CO alarm should be installed. Check with the fire department or municipal office to determine if there are by-laws requiring CO alarms.



Fire Escape Plans

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



Fire Separations

Students often find accommodation in older homes that have 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.



Security

Some property owners install bars on windows as a security measure. While this may seem appealing from a security point of view, it can prevent students 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.

See the reverse for valuable fire safety information that every student should know before moving away from home.

For more information:

Contact the administration offices of the college or university. They will frequently maintain a registry of available accommodation for students. Call the local fire department to determine if the building has been inspected for Fire Code compliance.

Electrical safety tips and information about common electrical hazards can be found at the Electrical Safety Authority website at: www.esainspection.net

Fire safety tips and information can be found at the Office of the Fire Marshal website at: www.ofm.gov.on.ca



Fire Safety Basics for Student Accommodation



When young people attend college or university, they will often be living away from home for the first time. This can be a concern for parents as they try to ensure their children will be safe when they're not living under the same roof. The following is important fire safety information that every student should know before moving away from home. Parents should discuss these basic fire safety rules with their kids before dropping them off at their new dwelling.

Cooking

Cooking is the number one cause of home fires in Ontario. If the student's accommodation has cooking facilities, there are some basic fire safety rules they must 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.

Space Heaters

The central heating systems in older accommodation is 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.

Candles

The use of candles is becoming more and more popular, especially among young people. 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.

Social Gatherings

Parties are as much a part of student life as attending classes. While most student parties are harmless fun, the consumption of alcohol combined with cooking or smoking can create a serious fire risk. To minimize the 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.

Smoking

Fires caused by smoking can be deadly. Even if they don't smoke themselves, chances are the student 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.

Smoke alarms

If a fire does occur, it is critical that the dwelling have working smoke alarms to alert occupants as soon as possible.

- The responsibility for smoke alarm installation and maintenance lies with the homeowner or landlord, however it is a good idea for parents to provide their child with a smoke alarm for his or her bedroom.
- It is against the law for tenants to disable or tamper with a smoke alarm.
- If a smoke alarm activates due to steam from the shower or cooking on the stove, oven or toaster, ask the landlord to move the alarm to a different location, or to install a smoke alarm with a pause 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.

Fire Escape Planning

When the smoke alarm sounds, everyone must know what to do and where to go. Encourage students to develop a fire escape plan, keeping the following in mind:

- Know two ways out of every room, if possible. The first way out would be the door, while the alternate escape could be a window that can be exited safely. Make sure all designated escape routes are accessible and free of clutter.
- Leave the building as quickly as possible. Once outside, don't re-enter the building for any reason.
- Call 9-1-1 from outside the building using a cell phone or neighbours' phone.

