

Ithaca College

A Relationship between Alcohol and Casualties of Fire

Some Facts about Alcohol and Fire Incidents

- Ages 15 to 34 incur the greatest number of alcohol-impaired fire casualties.
- Those who consume six or more drinks per occasion increased their risk for injury by eight times.
- Studies have shown the fire fatality risk ratio for an alcohol-impaired person was more than double the risk ratio of a sober person living without a smoke alarm.
- Research has found that about half of all adults killed in fires were under the influence of alcohol.
- A significant portion of fire fatalities were legally drunk at 0.08 percent blood-alcohol content (BAC).
- Eighty percent of fire fatalities with positive BAC were men.
- Smoking (53 percent), cooking (23 percent), and open-flame fires (14 percent) are the three leading causes for alcohol-impaired fatalities.
- The overwhelming majority of fire fatalities perish as a result of smoke and toxic fume inhalation as opposed to burn injuries. Evidence finds that alcohol not only impedes human detection of smoke, but also helps facilitate its passage into the body.
- Alcohol causes depression of the upper airway reflexes. In addition to enhancing the toxic effects of fire gases, a heightened BAC depresses the cough reflex.

Smoking and Alcohol: A Deadly Combination

- ❖ For people who drink and smoke, the fire fatality rate is higher. Most smoking-related fire fatalities have a common connection to alcohol consumption.
- ❖ Smoking is the leading cause of alcohol-impaired fatalities.
- ❖ Binge drinking was correlated to smoking among youth in the United States.
- ❖ “Social smoking” is a trend identified in the college-age population where individuals smoke only when in specific situations such as parties or bars.
- ❖ When combined, alcohol and smoking increase the chances of starting a fire while at the same time decreasing the chances of detecting, mitigating, and escaping the fire.

PROOF IS IN THE PRINT

March 19, 2000

Bloomsburg University

Fatalities: 3

A fire swept through a fraternity house in the morning hours and claimed the lives of three college students. Autopsies determined that each victim had an elevated BAC, which was a contributing factor in their death.

May 12, 1996

University of North Carolina (Chapel Hill)

Fatalities: 5 Injuries: 3

Shortly before dawn five occupants of a fraternity house in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, died after a fire roared through their house. Two students managed to survive by jumping from a third-floor window. They sustained serious injuries from their fall.

The fire occurred the night before the university's Mother's Day graduation ceremonies. Each victim had an elevated BAC from the party at the house that night. Careless use of smoking materials was determined to be the cause of the fire.

February 24, 1996

Radford University

Fatalities: 1

After drinking heavily, a 21-year-old Radford University student died in a fraternity house fire. His blood-alcohol content was 0.25, more than three times the legal limit. Officials believed that alcohol impaired the student's ability to sense smoke and flee the fire.

October 21, 1994

Bloomsburg University

Fatalities: 5

A pre-dawn fire at a fraternity house killed five students in Bloomsburg, Pennsylvania. Fire investigators believed a smoldering sofa that was moved out to a porch reignited and set the building ablaze. The initial fire was caused by careless use of smoking materials. Autopsy results showed that each of the four students had an elevated BAC. Two students also had traces of cocaine and marijuana in their systems.

About Environmental Health and Safety

- ❖ The Office of Environmental Health and Safety (EH&S), a division of the Office of Public Safety, provides a variety of fire safety, building safety, and environmental, health, and safety services to the campus community.
- ❖ Our team includes a New York State-certified building code official, a state-certified fire service instructor, and other skilled, experienced professionals who specialize in fire detection and suppression systems, state and local building safety codes, fire safety training, and fire safety inspections.
- ❖ We continuously inspect, test, and maintain all of the College's sprinklers, heat detectors, smoke detectors, fire extinguishers, pull stations, and automatic fire alarm systems.
- ❖ We conduct regular emergency evacuation drills ("fire drills") so students become familiar with the fire alarm signal and escape plan for the residential facility they live in.
- ❖ Through campus resident assistants (RAs), you can arrange to participate in student fire safety training programs, which are available through EH&S.

Questions?

Call the Office of Environmental Health and Safety, (607) 274-3333,
or the Office of Residential Life, (607) 274-3141.

Prepared by

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To report an EMERGENCY, call

911