

THE FIRE EMERGENCY

SPECIAL CENTERFOLD

It is the responsibility of all members of the college community to develop fire safety awareness and proper fire prevention housekeeping.

An individual's response to a fire emergency is directly related to her/his fire awareness, knowledge and experience. Most of us have not encountered a fire directly. It is therefore necessary to start with fundamentals.

The presentation on the next page is designed for posting so that you can have an overview of the fire emergency as a convenient reference.

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The Fire Emergency

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Fire Awareness

The best time to protect yourself from a fire is before the fire starts. Everyone should be aware of the location of:

- Fire exits. Make sure they are not obstructed.
- Available telephones during regular school hours as well as after hours.
- Standpipes, sprinklers, smoke detectors, fire extinguishers and fire alarm stations.

Fire drills should be scheduled on a regular basis. One becomes familiar with the evacuation routes and, through repetition, learns to perform this task in an orderly manner.

Fire extinguishers in the office and laboratory should be the appropriate type for the expected fire emergency and be capable of rapid use. All faculty and staff and selected students should be trained annually in the use of fire extinguishers and be aware of their location. Persons without the necessary hands-on training should not be permitted to operate a fire extinguisher. Develop a plan of action outlining what you and your colleagues would do in the event of a fire emergency.

Fire Prevention

The best way to fight a fire is to prevent it. Everyone should participate in the campus fire prevention program by reporting damaged or missing fire protection equipment and practicing good housekeeping. Good housekeeping includes:

- Prompt removal of waste.
- Repairing or replacing faulty electrical wires, plugs and appliances.

- Carefully extinguishing cigarettes, cigars, pipes.
- Proper use of heat producing equipment (hot plates, portable heaters, coffee pots, etc.)
- Separation of flammable liquids from combustible materials such as cardboard boxes and paper towels.
- Storage only of limited quantities of flammable material.
- Unobstructed aisles and exits.
- Keeping the workplace uncluttered.

Fire Survival

When the alarm bells ring:

- Evacuate the building immediately.
- Do not panic and run.
- Do not use the elevators.
- Turn off the lights.
- Close but do not lock the door if you are the last person to leave.

When you discover a fire:

- Notify your colleagues in the area.
- Locate and activate the nearest fire alarm.
- Proceed to the nearest stairwell and calmly walk down the stairs.
- After arriving at a safe place, dial 911 and notify the fire department and campus security. Give them as much information as possible about the location of the fire, what chemicals are involved, and about any people who may be injured or trapped.

When you encounter light smoke in the hall:

- Get as close as possible to the floor. There could be a 500° F difference between the floor and a height of six feet above the floor.

- Proceed to the nearest stairway.
- Feel the door with the back of your hand. If it is hot, proceed to the next stairwell.
- If the smoke becomes more dense at lower levels, turn around and walk up to clearer air on the roof.

When you encounter heavy smoke or impassable fire in the hall:

- Retreat back into your room.
- Close the door and try to seal all the openings to the hall, especially around the periphery of the door. Use wet cloth if water is accessible.
- If you have a telephone, call the fire department and security.
- If you have a window, open it to vent the smoke, provide fresh air and signal for assistance. Smoke and toxic gas resulting from fire account for over 75% of deaths due to fires.

Do Not Panic.

Do Not Run.

Do Not Use The Elevator.

When your clothing is on fire:

- Use the safety shower, if available, or douse yourself with water.
- If no water is available, use the **Stop, Drop and Roll** method. **Do Not Run.** This will only fan the flames and increase burning. Drop to the floor as soon as possible and roll until the fire is out.

- Douse with water to remove heat.
- Put clean cold cloths on burned areas.
- Wrap yourself to avoid shock and exposure.
- Get medical attention promptly.

Fighting A Fire

- A fire contained in a small vessel can usually be suffocated by covering the vessel. Do not pick up the vessel. Do not cover it with dry towels or cloths. Remove nearby flammable materials to avoid spreading the fire.
- If the fire cannot be suffocated quickly and simply, or if toxic gases and copious amounts of smoke are present, all persons should evacuate the area except those who are properly trained and equipped.
- If you have been trained in the use of a fire extinguisher, fight the fire from a position from which you can escape, and only if you are confident that you will be successful. Keep yourself between the fire and your avenue of escape. Small fires can often be extinguished but not always. If not extinguished, a fire can quickly threaten your life and that of your colleagues. It is easy to underestimate a fire.
- Immediately after the fire, all extinguishers that were used should be recharged or replaced with full ones.

Sources for this article include the following:

- City College of New York Fire Safety Plan.
- Safety in Academic Chemistry Laboratories, American Chemical Society, Committee on Chemical Safety, Fifth Edition, 1990.