

# Safety Roundup

Environmental Health & Safety Newsletter

FALL 2009

## Common Fire Safety Violations in UT Arlington Housing

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The Fire & Life Safety division of the Environmental Health & Safety Office inspects residences on campus each semester. Inspectors check for adherence to Housing Department policies and compliance with National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) Fire & Life Safety codes. The most frequently identified violations are described here:

### • Candles/Incense

Nationally, approximately 15,000 residential fires are started by candles every year. These fires result in an estimated 150 deaths and 1,200 injuries with direct property loss of about \$539 million. Candle fires accounted for 4% of all reported residential fires in 2005, according to the NFPA.

Possession or use of candles with wicks or evidence of burning and/or incense is prohibited in UT Arlington residences. The burning of candles and/or incense is a university policy violation, and these violations will be referred to the housing office for action. Candles were found in rooms 118 times out of 1810 total inspections, or 7 percent.

### • Extension Cord/Multi-Outlet adapter

Use of extension cords is prohibited on campus. There were 128 violations of this type in housing inspections over the past year. Multi-outlet adapters accounted for 5% of all violations.

Only heavy-duty, three prong, UL listed surge protection devices (SPDs) are allowed to protect sensitive equipment such as computers, printers, monitors and televisions. Surge protection equipment should never be used for appliances such as refrigerators and microwaves. There should be only one surge protector plugged into a single duplex electrical outlet. Surge protectors shall never be permanently mounted, run under the carpet, through door openings or across walking paths, or in other areas subject to physical damage. Surge protection devices should be inspected periodically for visual damage. If any damage is found during the inspection, it should be removed from service. Never plug a surge protector into an existing surge protector; this is called "daisy chaining" or "piggy backing" and can overload the electrical outlet.

Surge protectors should never be used in "wet areas" for the following equipment, or areas not equipped with Ground Circuit Fault Interrupters (GCFI):

- a) Aquariums
- b) Near a sink

Use of multi-outlet adapter without surge protection is also a university policy violation and will be referred to the housing office for action.



### • Sprinkler Heads

Sprinkler systems are designed to extinguish or control a fire. Sprinkler heads can be damaged easily. Hanging items from sprinkler heads is prohibited. An accidental sprinkler discharge can cost hundreds of dollars to replace the damaged head and restore the sprinkler system, as well as do thousands of dollars of water damage to the building and its contents. Sprinklers typically discharge approximately 20 gallons of water per minute if activated. Obstructions to sprinkler heads such as posters, tapestry, or cloth items attached to the ceiling or wall space covering sprinkler heads eliminates the benefits of the sprinkler. It's also a policy violation.

Finally, residents need to maintain an 18 inch clearance around sprinkler heads.

### • Smoke Detectors

Never cover, remove, or tamper with smoke detectors. Smoke detectors are connected to the building fire alarm systems that notify campus Police dispatch with the building, floor and room of the affected detector. Housing will fine occupants who tamper with life safety devices and students will be responsible for all costs for replacement of damaged equipment.



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## From the Director . . . *Ed Guida*



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Welcome to the Fall edition of Safety Roundup. We are excited with UT Arlington attaining the highest enrollment in the university's history. With this achievement comes safety issues, and we, in EH&S, want each and every one of you to have a successful and safe university experience.

First, we all must deal with the Novel Type A H1N1 influenza (aka "swine" flu). Medical authorities tell us to expect a large incidence this fall and winter. What can we do to break the spread of the flu? Wash our hands. Stay home when we're sick. Monitor information from the university on the flu ([www.uta.edu/ucomm/mediarelations/events/h1n1.php](http://www.uta.edu/ucomm/mediarelations/events/h1n1.php)). Wash our hands!

We know that living on campus is a great experience. We monitor the fire and life safety features of our campus residences through room by room inspections, and we have found that students do a pretty good job maintaining fire safety in their apartments and dormitory rooms. However, we have found a few significant problems that can greatly increase the risk of fire—please see our front page article, "Common Fire Safety Violations in Housing." Also, the campus is more crowded; it's

important to drive safely and within the campus speed limits—15 mph unless otherwise posted. Remember that pedestrians have the right of way in crosswalks.

We learn from the accidents of others. Last winter a young research assistant was burned in a freak laboratory accident at UCLA, and she died 3 weeks later. UCLA was fined by CalOSHA for significant safety violations—see our brief update. Safety is common sense, and our article, "Small Efforts Yield Big Safety Savings," helps us understand this counsel. And, because we should wash our hands frequently to thwart the spread of disease, we provide guidance on hand washing. Use hand sanitizer when soap and water are not convenient.

Students need to carry books, papers, computers, etc., and I see lots of backpacks. We provide recommendations from the American Academy of Pediatrics on how to prevent back pain and injury by packing backpacks properly and adjusting the straps. As always, be safe out there, Ed

## Small Efforts Yield Big Safety Savings

By Cynthia Babbitt

The phrase "keep it simple" is highly apropos to accident prevention. Time after time, when a safety professional performs an accident investigation, it is failure to follow basic safety practices that often results in costly accidents. The following are some of the more common unsafe acts that contribute to accidents.

1. Mental distractions where the individual is not concentrating on the task at hand. Perhaps the person is reliving unpleasant scenes from his personal life, or anticipating weekend activities, or simply chatting with a co-worker. Failure to stay focused on the task at hand can result in serious accidents.

2. Inattention to surroundings brings a person in direct contact with obvious safety hazards. Walking with books or boxes that block your view of the walking surface can result in trips and falls. Not carefully checking for obstacles on the side and back of a vehicle is a frequent cause for "object vehicle collisions and damage." Walking backwards while coiling up an electrical cord often precipitates tripping on things that are behind the person. Blindly reaching into a tool box can bring your hand into painful contact with an unguarded blade or the sharp tip of a tool. Poor housekeeping creates safety hazards.

3. Not wearing proper personal protective equipment exposes people to existing environmental hazards.

Working on the edge of the street setting up safety cones without wearing a reflective safety vest makes you invisible to passing motorists. Handling broken glass or sharp metal without wearing puncture resistant gloves is a recipe for cut hands and severed tendons. Wearing a bandana over your mouth and nose instead of using an approved respirator or "dust mask" offers little or no protection against airborne hazards. Not wearing earplugs because "I will get used to the noise" will surely result in permanent hearing loss.

4. Practicing improper body mechanics can have a negative impact on your long-term physical fitness. Take the time to break down a large, heavy load into several smaller, lighter loads. When possible, use lifting aids like dollies and pallet jacks. Remember to bend your knees and not your back when picking up and putting down a load. Pushing a loaded cart gives you mechanical advantage, while pulling a loaded cart places excessive strain on your lower back and shoulders. Use a "team lift" when moving awkward or heavy loads instead of attempting to lift it by yourself.

There are many more simple safety precautions that people often overlook when they are in a hurry or behave with the idea that they are "bulletproof." Take the time to think before you act whether you are at work or at home so that you don't have to "learn safety by accident."

# Back to School Safety Tips

Now that we're back for the Fall Semester, we should increase our awareness of some general safety issues. With a record enrollment of over 28,000, the streets and sidewalks are teeming with pedestrians. Watch your speed when driving around campus! Remember that the speed limit on campus is 15 miles per hour unless otherwise posted.

## Avoid Back Strain and Pain

Backpacks are a popular and practical way for students to carry books and supplies. When worn and packed correctly, backpacks evenly distribute weight to the back and stomach muscles—the body's strongest muscles. When the weight is unbalanced or too heavy, the load affects a student's posture, pulling them backward. Students compensate by bending forward at hips or arching their back. This can compress the spine and may injure muscles and joints and lead to severe back, neck, and shoulder pain, according to the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP).

Wearing a backpack over just one shoulder is also a bad idea. The off-balance load can cause the wearer to lean to one side to make up for the extra weight, and this can strain the neck and shoulders and lead to back pain.

The AAP recommends that students carry no more than 10% to 15% of their body weight in their backpacks. Look for these features when choosing and buying a backpack: lightweight; wide, padded shoulder straps; two shoulder straps; padded back; waist belt and multiple compartments; and/or a rolling backpack.

To prevent injury when using a backpack, follow these recommendations:

- **Pack light.** As noted, loaded backpacks should never weigh more than 10% to 15% of a person's total body weight. Make sure you take only what is needed for the school day—extra clothes and unneeded electronics add unnecessary pounds.

- **Organize** the load to use all of the backpack's compartments. Pack heavier items closest to the center of the back and arrange books and materials so they won't slide around in the backpack. On days the backpack is overloaded, you should hand carry a book or other item.

- **Always use both shoulder straps.** Slinging a backpack over one shoulder can strain muscles and may increase curvature of the spine.

- **Tighten the straps** so the pack is close to the body. The straps should hold the pack 2 inches above the waist.

- **Bend using both knees.** Don't bend at the waist when wearing or lifting a heavy backpack. Learning how to lift heavy objects properly can help avoid back injuries.

*Information gathered from UAB Health System website.*

## Recycling Batteries

The Mail Services department has notified EH&S that they would prefer not to handle batteries through the campus mail. However, we will still continue to recycle them. If your department has been sending batteries to EH&S in mail envelopes, please collect them in a container instead and EH&S will pick these up at your office at the same time we come to get printer cartridges. You may call ext. 2-2185 to schedule a pickup or send an email to [ehsrecycling@uta.edu](mailto:ehsrecycling@uta.edu).

The **Maverick Office Green Team** is a campus-wide initiative that goes beyond the typical environmental initiatives that many individuals, offices, and departments at UT Arlington already support. This program takes a coordinated, long-term and campus-wide approach, providing resources, helpful guidelines, and on-going consultation as needed. It also provides recognition to outstanding Maverick Office Green Teams including a reception with the President.

Learn all about the Maverick Office Green Team and ways to go greener in your department at [www.uta.edu/sustainability/greenteam](http://www.uta.edu/sustainability/greenteam). You can also fill out an application online to get started today!



## UPDATE:

### UCLA Fined for Fatal Lab Fire

As a supplement to the article which appeared in our Spring 2009 issue, in May the California Division of Occupational Safety and Health (OSHA) fined UCLA almost \$32,000 for three “serious” violations of workplace safety laws in the fatal burning of a staff research assistant in a December 2008 chemistry lab fire.

The findings by the Cal/OSHA concluded that Sheharbano “Sheri” Sangji, 23, had not been properly trained and was not wearing protective clothing when an experiment exploded, spreading second- and third-degree burns over 43% of her body.

Cal/OSHA also cited UCLA for not addressing deficiencies noted in an internal safety inspection two months before the fatal fire occurred in this organic chemistry laboratory, including a finding that workers were not wearing lab coats.

State officials said the UCLA fine was the largest among seven recent cases involving accidents at academic research labs or those in the chemical and biotechnology industries.

*—as reported by the Los Angeles Times, May 5, 2009*

# Wash Your Hands to Prevent Flu

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The influenza virus—the seasonal variety that comes with the winter months as well as the H1N1 flu—is passed from one person to another when someone sneezes or coughs either into their hand or into the air. The droplets that contain the virus can then be passed to another person in a crowded area or to someone who shakes hands with an infected person or to someone who touches a door knob, handle, telephone, hand-rail, or tool that an infected person has also touched.

Of all the flu illness prevention strategies, hand washing is one of the easiest and most important to stop the flu in its tracks.

If you ever sneeze or cough into your hands and then go to pick up a telephone, use a computer, press an elevator button or touch a doorknob, without good hand washing, you are essentially a walking aerosol can of germs!

Without a doubt, frequent hand washing is the single most effective way to keep germs at bay and to prevent illness and infection. Wash your hands before meals, after using the restroom and when you have spent time in public areas. Wash your hands when you sneeze into your hands and after you "blow your nose." Remember to keep your hands away from your face, especially your mouth, nose and eyes. It is also important that you do hand washing the right way for it to be effective.

Here's a quick guide on hand washing that will zap any germ in its tracks:

1. Turn the faucet on with a paper towel. (While the CDC recommends only turning off the faucet with a paper towel, it's a good idea to use one to turn it on since the sink is contaminated).

2. Wet your hands with warm running water and apply soap.
3. Rub hands together vigorously to make a soapy lather.
4. Rub all surfaces including your wrists, between your fingers, back of your hands, under your fingernails and cuticles, and around any rings.
5. Rub your hands for 15-20 seconds. (No timer is needed; just imagine singing "Happy Birthday" twice).
6. Rinse your hands well.
7. Dry your hands using a paper towel or air dryer.
8. Use your paper towel to turn off the faucet if possible.

**Always use soap and water if your hands are visibly dirty. Alcohol-based hand sanitizers are an excellent alternative if soap and water are not available.** Become a hand washing fanatic for a bit and at the same time you become the boss over swine flu!

### References:

Prevent Swine Flu—*Wash Your Hands* (<http://www.drgwennisin.com/2009/04/swine-flu-vs-soap-our-bets-on-soap.html>), by Dr. Gwenn, Founder, Pediatrics Now - April 28, 2009.

Worried about Swine Flu? Wash Your Hands! Laborer's Health and Safety fund of North America, Life Lines on line, published: May 2009, Vol.15.Num.2.

H1N1 Flu Awareness: *Hygiene Listen To This Podcast* <http://www2a.cdc.gov/podcasts/player.asp?f=11438> This podcast briefly discusses ways you can protect yourself from novel H1N1 flu. Created: 5/6/2009 by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

## EH&S Training Courses

**Heartsaver AED/CPR: EH&S Training Room, 9:00 a.m to 12:00 p.m.**

Nov. 4 (Wed.) Dec. 3 (Th) Jan. 14 (Th) Feb. 9 (Tu) March 11 (Th)

**15-Passenger Van Training:** Complete the online course first at [www.uta.edu/ra/real/loginscreen](http://www.uta.edu/ra/real/loginscreen). **The hands-on driving test will be conducted at 10:00 a.m. and 2:00 p.m. on the dates below. On Jan. 7 and Feb. 4 afternoon training will be at 3 p.m.** Meet at the EH&S office, 500 Summit Ave. Drivers must also take the Defensive Driving Course and have a current DPS driving record check to attend.

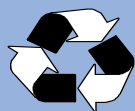
Oct 22 Nov 10 & 19 Dec. 1 Jan. 7 & 19 Feb 4 & 23 March 4 & 25

**Fire Extinguisher Training:** See the Human Resources training calendar for course dates and to register for extinguisher training: <https://policy.uta.edu/HRWeb/Application?cmd=classes>

**Defensive Driving Course (DDC)** is available online at [www.uta.edu/ra/real/loginscreen](http://www.uta.edu/ra/real/loginscreen). This must be completed every 3 years to remain an authorized driver of UTA vehicles. DPS driving record checks must be renewed annually.

**Hazard Communication Training & Bloodborne Pathogens Training** may also be taken online. You may register and access the course at [www.uta.edu/ra/real/loginscreen](http://www.uta.edu/ra/real/loginscreen).

Call us at 2-2185 if you need other required training which is available on CD such as Lift Truck, Lockout/Tagout, Respirator, Shipping Infectious Materials, and Hot Work Safety.



Our newsletter is printed on recycled paper.

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