

SPRINKLER WORKS



LIFE SAFETY: SPRINKLER LEGISLATION AND FRATERNAL SUPPORT

Help Pass the "Collegiate Housing and Infrastructure Act" (CHIA)

Colleges and universities nationwide are experiencing severe housing shortages due to ever-increasing student enrollment. Schools are now beginning to implement undesirable temporary policies in an effort to meet the demand for on-campus accommodations. For example, in New Orleans, Tulane University undergraduates were forced to live in lounges and study rooms because the dormitory rooms were filled to capacity.

Faced with the same problem, administrators at the University of Connecticut converted many two-student rooms into three-student rooms. At St. Louis University, the move-in date for a group of students was delayed until after the first week of classes because the university had not yet finished outfitting the nearby hotel to which they were assigned. With predictions that post-secondary enrollment will increase 15 percent between 1999 and 2011, quality collegiate housing options will become a more challenging issue confronting all of higher education.

Fraternities and sororities operate \$3 billion in not-for-profit student housing. They help alleviate the housing burden on colleges and universities by housing 250,000 students each year, making them the largest not-for-profit student landlords in the nation. They are an important safety valve in the collegiate housing market. Frankly, if they closed their chapter houses tomorrow, colleges and universities would not have the financial ability to build residential spaces needed to accommodate the influx of students, and it is doubtful that most college towns want to see more students renting residences further out into their respective communities.

Fraternity and sorority houses currently face several challenges that other collegiate housing does not. First, they generally lack the total capacity to accommodate the increasing student population at a time when colleges and universities need them to handle their share of students. Second, fraternity and sorority housing is significantly older than most other campus housing, which creates a number of hazards that challenges their future ability to operate effectively. They need funds to build new chapter housing, and need funding to retrofit their housing to accommodate the modern conveniences today's students expect as part of their living and learning spaces. Most importantly, they need funding to install safety upgrades such as fire sprinklers, as safety issues are the top challenge facing fraternal housing.

Current federal tax law allows taxpayers to deduct almost all contributions to non-profit educational organizations, such as colleges and universities. These tax-deductible contributions may be used by these organizations to improve student facilities such as dormitories, dining facilities, meeting rooms, laboratories and study areas. Unfortunately, the same tax laws largely prohibit fraternal educational foundations from using tax-deductible charitable contributions to make the same student infrastructure improvements colleges and universities can make with tax-deductible funds.

For the past several years, Greek leaders have been converging on Washington to educate them about the need to change the law and level the playing field for improving non-profit student housing.

The Collegiate Housing and Infrastructure Act "CHIA" (S.781/H.R. 1547) was first introduced in April of 2003 and the legislation would, if passed, ultimately allow tax deductible charitable contributions to fraternity and sorority foundations to be used for the same purposes that a college or university could use such contributions. That means a local chapter's house corporation who has needed property and life-safety

improvements of all types could eventually use these contributions from your national fraternity's educational foundations. Fire sprinklers, a new roof, security equipment, new fixtures and other housing improvements could be funded with tax-deductible charitable contributions to your national fraternity's educational foundation.

The August 27, 2004 death of three Alpha Tau Omega brothers in a chapter house fire at the University of Mississippi is a stark and tragic reminder that we can do better to improve the safety of our fraternity housing. The installation of fire sprinklers in fraternal housing is especially important given the age and size of most fraternal living facilities. For instance, the injury rate in fraternity and sorority housing is twice that of other campus fires and the rate of property loss is significantly higher. Installation of safety systems is just one of the many necessary improvements that will make student living across the country safer and better suited to an environment of academic and personal enrichment. Passing the Collegiate Housing and Infrastructure Act will give fraternity and sorority organizations a real chance to raise the money needed to install new safety equipment in their houses.

This bill is crucial to the welfare of the higher education community in general and the college fraternity community in particular, and its benefits will be widespread and significant. It will not only benefit the quarter of a million students comprising the nation's largest network of young volunteers, but also the colleges and universities that educate them.

If you would like to communicate your support of the Collegiate Housing and Infrastructure Act by writing a letter to your local Congressman, you may obtain a sample letter at: www.fraternalcaucus.com (click on "Petition Your Congressman")

Serious fires in student housing wreak almost unimaginable devastation and disruption; this potential warrants careful consideration of fire safety options. In particular, automatic sprinkler systems should be considered as a viable option; they have established an impressive record of preventing residential fire catastrophes, particularly in the hospitality industry. With technologies developed specifically for residential applications, automatic sprinkler systems are now commonplace in hotels and motels, where they afford the traveling public with a high level of fire safety. College students deserve this same high level of protection ... and their parents expect it.

Timothy P. Travers, EFO, CFO

New England Regional Manager
National Fire Sprinkler Assn.

Tim has an extensive background in fire protection including over 35 years of service with the Whitman, Massachusetts Fire Department, a suburb of Boston.

With over twenty years as Chief of Department, he has many appointments to his credit, including the Massachusetts Department of Fire Services, Special Operations Team where he served as an Operations Chief; the Massachusetts Fire Service Commission where he was elected as Chairman; the Task Force on Fire & Building Safety, a committee charged with making a comprehensive review of the Commonwealth's building and fire codes; and the Fire Science Technology Program Advisory Board at Massasoit Community College.

Tim is a Life Member of the International Association of Fire Chiefs. He can be contacted at Travers@NFSA.org.



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