

Fire chief: Alarm numbers remain stable

BY CHRIS BONING
Assistant News Editor

Fires and false alarms have set Truman and other schools aflame.

Delayed repairs to Missouri Hall's fire alarm system have proven an issue on campus as colleges and universities nationwide examine ways to improve fire safety on their campuses. The residence hall experienced eight false alarms in two months, according to fire department documents.

John Mounsey, coordinator for facilities and process design for Residence Life, said repair work on Missouri's alarm system is complete for the most part, and the alarms in each of the rooms have been individually adjusted.

Mounsey said the alarms in Missouri Hall have been set so that if one goes off in an individual room, the only place it will register is on the building's remote system panel on the first floor.

Mounsey said he thinks many people have complained about the situation in Missouri Hall because of how frequently the alarms sounded. He said he acknowledged that there were some instances in which the alarms went off at inconvenient times and that at least once students were kept out of the building for about an hour.

"We're willing to take a little bit more responsibility ... have our staff check [a single alarm] instead of inconveniencing the entire building," he said. The rationale is if there's a fire in the room, it should set off a sprinkler head or the occupants of the room should go ahead and pull the alarm.

Mounsey said that before the renovation, the rooms in Missouri Hall had battery-operated smoke detectors. The advantage of having a wired system is it allows hall staff to identify problems in rooms more easily and more quickly.

"Any time one of the panels goes off, someone from our staff is going to respond to it," he said. "If not, there's still the secondary alarm [that] is going to go ahead and dump the building, so we'll still catch it."

Mounsey said it took awhile to pinpoint the problem in Missouri Hall with the system because no one knew to readjust the sensitivity settings.

Mounsey said he doesn't expect there to be as many issues with the fire alarms when Blanton, Nason and Brewer Halls open again next fall because the University has learned what to do.

"We're not going to make the same mistakes twice," he said. "... We're smart enough to fix the problem."

Kirksville Fire Chief Randy Behrens said the city follows the 2003 International Fire Code set forth by the International Codes Council and that it mandates wired alarm systems in new construction, including renovated buildings depending on how much is remodeled.

He said the number of alarms at Missouri Hall this semester has been no different than past years.

Campbell Apartments has had the most false alarms of all the campus housing facilities, he added. Behrens said Campbell usually has the most dispatches because, unlike residence hall rooms, each apartment has a kitchen.

"[It's] the same way if you

happen to burn something if you're living in your own home and the smoke alarm goes off," he said. "[Except] it doesn't go to an alarm panel. [In] Campbell Apartments it goes to an alarm panel, and it signals the whole response [system]."

Behrens said August through October generally is the busiest time for answering alarms at the University. He said he thinks those months are the worst for alarms because it's the beginning of the school year and students are getting used to living on campus.

"One of the leading causes [of fire alarms] is burning stuff in the microwave," he said.

Behrens said about 17 percent of all the alarms to which the fire department responds each year are false.

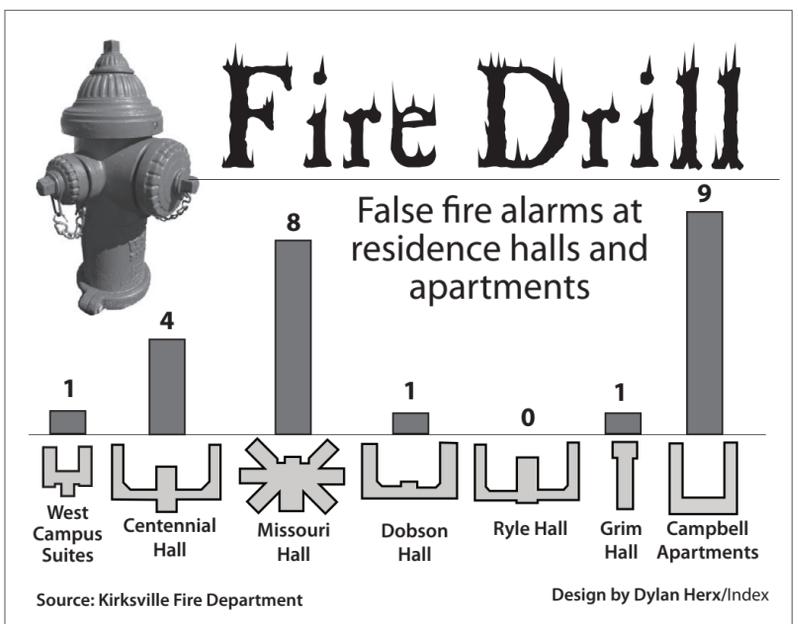
"The main thing is once we go, we want to make sure that's exactly what it is," he said. "So, it's important for everyone to evacuate the building and make sure they stay out until we're positive that that's what it was. ... We don't want to send you into a building that's actually on fire."

Behrens said the number of alarms at the University has remained relatively stable for the past five years. It often looks like there are many more alarms than there really are because the fire department also assists ambulances when they are summoned to campus, he added.

Behrens said he anticipates having to answer many alarms at Blanton, Nason and Brewer Halls when they reopen in the fall.

"It just seems with a brand new system, you got to fine tune them a little bit to get them," he said.

Ed Comeau, publisher of the



monthly online newsletter Campus Firewatch, said his publication serves as an information portal on fire safety for colleges and universities.

Comeau said fire safety always is an important issue on campuses, although awareness has increased within the past several years.

He cited the Seton Hall University fire, which killed three students in 2003, as well as other accidents, for catching the attention of parents, students and administrators.

Eighty percent of college-related fires occur in off-campus housing, he said. Comeau added

that four factors influence these fires: the absence of a sprinkler system, missing smoke detectors, impaired judgement while intoxicated and careless disposal of smoking materials.

Comeau said that despite the majority of fires happening at off-campus locations, schools are beginning to minimize the risks for fires by installing sprinkler systems and aggressively educating students about fire safety.

"The bottom line is it is a personal responsibility of the students to know what to do," he said. "What's important too is to provide this information while

they're living in the residence halls so that when they do move off-campus, hopefully some of this information has stuck so they'll know how to pick fire-safe housing and how to prevent a fire, what to do if one should break out."

Comeau said students should remember that being knowledgeable about fire safety isn't limited to when they're on campus.

"It's something to know no matter where you are - whether you're in your residence hall, fraternity, sorority, your house, apartment, a restaurant, a night club, a movie theater," he said.

Adopting healthy habits can prevent college weight gain

BY ANSHU THAPA
for the Index

Students often talk lightly about gaining the "Freshman 15," but the effects of eating unhealthy food can be long-lasting and dangerous.

A national health objective for 2010 is to reduce the prevalence of obesity among adults to less than 15 percent, according to the National Center for Health Statistics, a branch of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, but current data indicate the situation is worsening rather than improving. Health professionals, government officials and entrepreneurs began reviewing results at the National Prevention & Health Promotion Summit on Tuesday in Washington, D.C.

College students are no exception. The CDC estimates that the obesity rate has doubled among college students over the past decade, due in part to more colleges and universities contracting out meal services to fast food chains.

At Truman, 34 percent of men and 41 percent of women consider themselves overweight, according to the spring 2005 American College Health Association's National College Health Assessment. This is slightly lower than the state average for men (40.5 percent) for men and higher than the state average for women (31.2 percent).

Currently, almost two-thirds of American adults are overweight, and nearly half of those people are obese, meaning they have a Body Mass Index of at least 30, according to the American Obesity Association.

The most important concern about obesity is the increased risk it carries of certain health conditions, including early-age heart attacks, strokes, cardiovascular diseases, diabetes and knee and joint problems, said Stephen Hadwiger, associate professor of nursing.

Many ways people choose to control their weight are unhealthy and counterproductive because they focus on body image rather than health, Hadwiger said.

"I would discourage someone from [changing weight just] for the sake of body image," Hadwiger said.

Hadwiger said he recommends small changes to create a healthier lifestyle.

"[Healthy] doesn't mean massive dieting, crash course or massive exercising, but just some general modifications that are realistic and more achievable," he said.

Sophomore Brian McClain said he is not surprised to learn that obesity across campuses in America is on the rise.

"It makes sense," McClain said. "... The food in the cafeteria, pizzas, fries, cake everything is fattening. Sometimes there are healthier food options, but it is less appealing."

McClain said the limited hours in the dining halls and at the Student Union Building make eating healthily more difficult.

"At home I am used to eating later and being satisfied throughout the rest of the night," he said. "Eating around five or six, I get hungry at night and order out or go to McDonald's."

Kokushin Hirokawa, a freshman from Japan, said he thinks the reason students gain weight is inactivity.

"I don't know why people here don't like walking as much," Hirokawa said. "It surprises me when people here drive two blocks away."

Hirokawa said he thinks students don't consider the consequences of their lifestyles. If people examined their diets more closely, they would see significant changes, he said.

"My girlfriend thinks I am going to gain weight since I am in the U.S. and we eat burgers all the time," Hirokawa said. "I want to prove her wrong so I make sure I

work out at least four to five times a week, either go running or go to the gym."

Hirokawa said eating habits in the U.S. are different than in Japan. Hirokawa said they were served only tea and water at the cafeteria and did not have access to sodas and juices with added sugar.

Lora Cunningham, assistant to the University director of Sodexo, said students should make intelligent choices for healthy food.

"We provide them with all the necessary information for them to be able to make healthy choices," Cunningham said.

She said the University contractually determines operating hours for the dining facilities.

Student recreation director Susan Limestall said the obesity rate at Truman is no different than other American colleges. She said students fight extra weight at the rec center.

The rec center sees an average of 563 students per day and more than 1,000 on busy days, but there is room for improvement, Limestall said.

"They start the week with good intentions and when the reality of the week with work load hits them, they ... tend to be doing other things," said Limestall.

Limestall said getting started with an exercise plan doesn't have to be difficult.

"Getting started can be as simple as getting a comfortable pair of shoe and walking 30 minutes a day," Limestall said. "Make that commitment. You don't have to join the gym or buy fancy exercise clothes but you need to make it a priority."

She said students are more motivated to work out during certain times of the year.

"We see students working out to get in shape for Spring Break and look good on the beach," Limestall said. "Why not have that commitment to look good throughout the year?"



Senior Anne Dickinson visits the C-Store in Barnett Hall Wednesday. A variety of healthy grab-and-go options are available in the Mainstreet Market at the SUB and in C-Stores across campus.



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