

# October ignites need of fire prevention

## Firefighters recognize Fire Prevention Week and emphasize escape routes

BY VALERIE SPENCER  
Staff Reporter

Where there's smoke there might not always be fire, but it's a good idea to be prepared.

October is National Fire Prevention Month, and Oct. 7 began National Fire Prevention Week. The week of awareness was founded after the Great Chicago Fire in Oct. 1871 when the National Fire Protection Association decided to promote fire safety during the first full week in October.

Fire Chief Randy Behrens said that each year, Fire Prevention Week features a different theme, as decided by the National Fire Protection Association. He said this year's theme highlights knowing and understanding home escape routes in case of fire.

"Of all the homes that do have escape plans, only 23 percent are practicing them," Behrens said. "So this year's theme is 'Practice Your Escape Plan.'"

Behrens said he wants everyone to take fire-related issues like fire drills seriously, even when they don't think the drills are important.

"Especially for the students who live in dorms, when you do hear a fire alarm, get out," Behrens said. "Regardless of whether you think it's a drill or not, just get out. That's the best way you can protect yourself. That alarm is your first warning that something's wrong."

Andrea O'Brien, director of Residence Life, said she agrees that students should treat evacuations with sincerity.

"If people don't evacuate, there is a penalty, and they have to go through the conduct system," O'Brien said. "So students will receive a fine if they don't evacuate the building for a fire drill or a fire emergency."

O'Brien said Residence Life has enacted certain measures in an attempt to cut down on the number of residence hall fires in recent years, including restricting the number of potentially dangerous appliances allowed in rooms.

"We limit the number of people who bring air conditioners by requiring doctor's notes," O'Brien said. "... If everyone brought one it would overtax the electrical system which could cause major problems."

O'Brien said that in previous years, there also have been problems with students leaving food unattended on stoves or in ovens in residence hall kitchens has caused a large percentage of residence hall fires.

"We've put 15-minute timers [on the ovens], and although they're inconvenient for students to use sometimes, the purpose is for students to be attending whatever they're cooking," O'Brien said. "... So if students are watching [the stove], they can just reset the timer for another 15 minutes."

But O'Brien said that try as she might, she knows people still will continue to burn food.

"I don't know how to teach people how to make popcorn properly," O'Brien said. "That's probably one of the number one things that ends up happening is somebody burns popcorn, and that sets off the fire alarm. So we've been trying to educate students about how to pop popcorn without burning it."

One student who knows about microwave-induced fires is freshman Laura Hill.

Hill said she was trying to heat up a Quaker oatmeal square in its package when she accidentally set the timer for too long, left the room and came back to see smoke rising from the microwave.

"We saw the package was smoking, and we all started freaking out," Hill said. "... Then the alarm started



Photo submitted  
Two firefighters look on during the Kirksville Fire Department's Flammable Liquid Training Class on Aug. 20.

going off in my room, so my roommate's brother took the fire alarm thing out to turn it off. And then the room smelled like smoke for a while. It was bad."

Hill said that however bad it was, she has tried to learn from the experience and take to heart the messages of Fire Prevention Week.

"Luckily I had someone there who knew what to do, like turn the fire alarm off and pour water on [the fire], which I was too frazzled at the time to think

about," Hill said. "So it was probably a good experience because now I know you've got to be careful."

O'Brien said she hopes everyone will be careful when dealing with potentially hazardous situations and also will take care of each other during fire emergencies.

"We try to let students know at the beginning of the year, especially in a residence hall, if they wouldn't mind knocking on every door they walk by, that way if there are people in that room

and they're sleeping ... they'll wake up, and everyone can get out safely," O'Brien said.

Behrens said he also encourages those in the community to look after each other and talk to others about fire prevention and fire safety.

"It sure can't hurt to talk about it," Behrens said. "If you're going to someone's house and they don't have a smoke detector, remind them to buy one and get one installed. Just spread the word."



Photo submitted  
Fire Prevention Week, which started Oct. 7, was founded after the Great Chicago Fire in Oct. 1871. This year, the National Fire Protection Association is emphasizing having, knowing and practicing escape routes in case of a fire.

## Student volunteers to put out fires, help save lives

BY VALERIE SPENCER  
Staff Reporter

The roof would never be on fire if it were up to Nick Zotos.

Junior Nick Zotos has spent more than a year working at the Novinger Northern Fire Department as a volunteer firefighter. His interest in firefighting began as a childhood ambition and has grown into a humanitarian hobby.

Zotos said he worked at a fire department in St. Louis and was interested in continuing his vocation through college. Although the Kirksville Fire Department doesn't have volunteer programs, Zotos said he noticed the rural fire departments needed extra help.

"The rural departments outside of Kirksville don't have a lot of money, don't have a lot of personnel and don't have a lot of resources because they don't have much of a tax base," Zotos said. "They loved it that somebody was young and willing to come help them out."

Although Zotos said he isn't planning on making firefighting his career, he still enjoys and takes pride in what he does.

"It's something the average person isn't going to get to do," Zotos said. "And since I don't necessarily want this to be a career, it's awesome to be able to do it now when I'm young and be able to say I did it."

Zotos said Novinger Northern averages about 350 calls a year from citizens needing aid with a variety of matters – from fires to car crashes and even pets in distress.

"We got a call about a dog down a well, just like out of the movies," Zotos said.

Zotos said the firefighters were unable to rescue the puppy from the well-like hole in someone's yard so they had to send a member of their crew down after it. Being the smallest one there, Zotos was the best candidate to descend through the two-foot-wide opening and retrieve the animal.

"Finally someone says, 'Hang on – before we send a person down there let's try something,'" Zotos said. "So they tied a slipknot with a rope and let it down there, and that dog was so eager to get out that he stepped right in the slipknot, they pulled it, pulled him out and he was perfectly fine. He was wet, muddy, and we all took a picture with him."

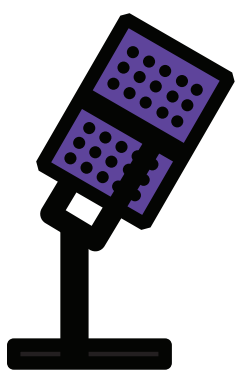
Zotos said he doesn't expect everyone to take volunteering to the level he did, but he encourages others to get involved in the community.

"You have to find something you enjoy," Zotos said. "That's going to encourage you to do more. I truly enjoy what I do, and that's what keeps me drawn to it."

"Since I don't necessarily want this to be a career, it's awesome to be able to [volunteer] now when I'm young and be able to say I did it."

Nick Zotos  
Junior

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