

## Twenty-two percent of city's alarms at A&M

# Campus fire prevention may 'fall short'

By JEANNE GRAHAM

*Editor's note: This is the first in a two-part series on fire prevention in College Station. In Wednesday's Battalion, Dave Tewes looks at fire code enforcement in local businesses.*

The College Station Fire Department, also on call to Texas A&M University, uses fire trucks with ladders that reach only three stories.

High rise buildings on campus (defined as any building with more than three stories) such as Rudder Tower and the Oceanography and Meteorology building must have built-in fire prevention measures for maximum safety. Fire Chief Doug

Landua says that in some areas Texas A&M falls short.

"Last year there were a total of 599 alarms with 22 percent of those on the Texas A&M campus," Chief Landua said recently. "With our limited manpower and equipment, good built-in protection is a must."

Rudder Tower and the O&M building, as well as the Memorial Student Center, have, within the last year, added fire prevention systems that include fire alarms and detectors, standpipes, and sprinklers.

Safety and Health Department Head, James Presswood, explained that the buildings feature automatic fire detection and alarm systems that are set off when any particle of combustion interrupts the circuit.

"The alarm systems work by radio transmission and will set off an alarm in both the emergency operator's office and the Texas A&M Police Department," he said.

Standpipes systems, consisting of pipes extending from ground level to the building's ceiling with a valve and hose available on each floor, have also been installed in each high-rise and in some dorms.

These would allow a trained occupant to pull the hose and fight a fire himself, Presswood said. They also give firemen a place to tie on their hoses when they arrive.

"Sprinkler systems are installed in all of the trash chutes of the dorms and in the Health Center," Presswood said, "and we are in the process of putting them in the MSC basement and coffeehouse. The MSC crafts shop and storage room under the large auditorium and the backstage area in the theater will also be equipped."

In addition to the built-in devices, the high-rises and enclosed dorms have fire-safe stairs that will remain "intact and sturdy" for 90 minutes after a fire starts and will keep heat and smoke from persons escaping the fire, Presswood said.

"I definitely feel that additional precaution could be taken," Landua said, "specifically with more complete standpipe and sprinkler systems."

Landua said it does no good to partially protect a building with sprinklers because fire can easily spread to unprotected areas.

A sprinkler system should be installed throughout a complex, Landua said, and though it would be a major cost to the university, the cost could possibly be equalled by a good insurance premium obtained in return.

The standpipe system is an asset to the fire department because it gives firemen a place to hook up their hoses. But there are buildings on campus that lack such a system.

"In the Academic building, for instance," Landua said, "the only way

to get to a fire on the fourth floor would be to hand-carry fire hoses up the stairs. We don't have the manpower to do that effectively."

All of the dorms on campus have working standpipes except the Corps dorms, and they were disconnected several years ago due to a little too much "good Aggie bull," Landua said. The standpipe systems in the other dorms were made inaccessible to students for that reason.

"The ideal situation," he said, "would be to have complete standpipe and sprinkler systems in every vulnerable building on campus."

But Presswood says extra systems would be impractical. "We just haven't seen the need for them."

The buildings that do not have standpipe and-or sprinkler systems are equipped with portable fire extinguishers and have enclosed, fire-safe stairwells.

"There are 5,000 portable extinguishers on campus," Presswood said, "and we inspect them monthly."

He explained, "we hold fire extinguishing programs during the summer with hands-on demonstrations for all resident advisers (R.A.'s) and many staff members."

"We spent hours learning fire extinguishing procedures," said Gene Fissler, resident adviser on the first floor of Aston Hall.

There are four carbon dioxide-type extinguishers on each floor of the dorms. They are located behind locked doors, but only the RA's have a key.

Fissler said the RA's have been given instructions about what to do in case of fire, but he's not sure how aware dorm residents are.

"Fire drills were talked about, but we haven't had one yet. I'm not sure anyone except the RA's in this dorm would know what to do in case of fire," he said.

The dorms have enclosed stairwells, but the doors normally remain open for the general flow of traffic.

"There is a device on each door," Landua explained, "that, when heat-activated, will snap, allowing the door to close. But if the device malfunctioned during a fire, leaving any door open, the purpose of keeping smoke out would be defeated. And the smoke that the carpets and foams in the dorms would create is lethal."

The stairwells in Rudder Tower and the O&M building are more effective because they remain closed all the time. In addition, evacuation plans are posted on each floor of the buildings. The O&M building has several fire drills each year.

Chuck Cargill, director of Rudder Tower, says that fire protection in that complex is adequate.

"Fire protection is a major item of concern with us because of all the off-campus guests we have coming through the building," he said.

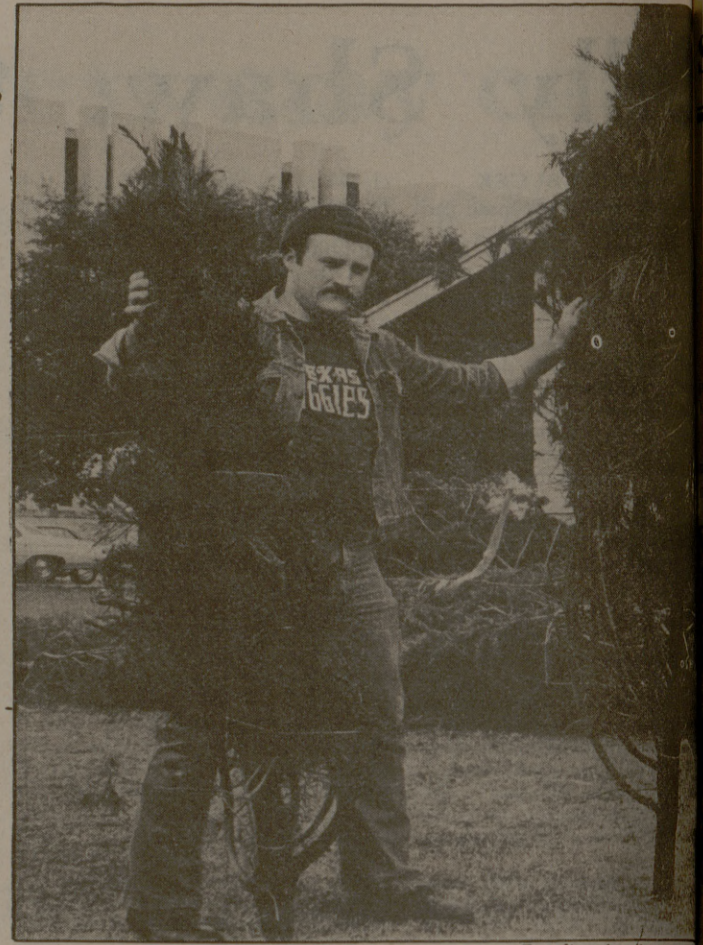
The Tower has standpipes without the sprinkler systems that Chief Landua suggests. But on Oct. 10, fire prevention experts finished a study of the Tower and approved the system as it is.

If the fire precautions in university buildings do fail, and the fire department is needed, Landua says that it is sometimes a problem getting the major fire equipment (fire trucks) on campus.

"The university needs to check with us to find out how much area we need. Any building over 150 feet from a public road or street must have a fire lane (with no parking) that is 20 feet in width with a 14-foot height clearance. Because of the crowded parking situation on campus, this amount of space cannot always be provided," Landua said.

"When the university is planning a new building," Landua added, "we ought to be able to voice our opinion about what goes into it."

"We try our darnedest to get every safeguard," he said. "We make recommendations, but what we recommend and what they do sometimes vary."



Battalion photo by David...

### 'Tis the season

Christmas is coming, and trees are being sold on campus this year for students who want to make their dorms or apartments a little more like home. John Haverer displays trees sold by the Forestry Club in front of the Commons dorm area. Lambda Sigma honor society is also selling Christmas trees.

## Safe use of medical equipment taught

Doctors, nurses, therapists, technicians and administrators will gather from around the state for a course on "Selection and Safe Operation of Medical Equipment" to be held in the Rudder Tower Convention Center Dec. 9-10.

Temple's Scott and White Memorial Hospital, along with Texas A&M's Colleges of Medicine and Engineering will present the program according to co-director, Dr. William Hyman of the bioengineering program.

The course will provide the participants with a practical knowledge of techniques for medical instrumentation, of the legal liabilities associated with the use of medical devices, as well as hospital mechanical, environmental, radiological and electrical safety," explained Hyman.

Scott and White Memorial Hospital certifies that this continuing medical education course meets criteria for 11 credit hours for Physicians Recognition Award in AMA.

"The increasingly widespread use of advanced medical equipment, including direct connections to hospital patient, offers new challenges to hospital personnel," went on.

The course content includes physiological effects of electrical equipment, medical equipment selection, maintenance, use; electrical, mechanical, radiological and environmental safety; and legal liabilities.

The program begins with a.m. registration Dec. 9 in the Rudder Tower Convention Center, will end at noon Dec. 10.

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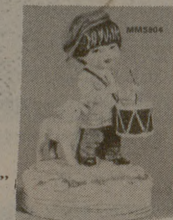
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