

Fire sprinkler inadequacies found in dorms

BY BRADY CREEL
The Battalion

Tuesday's fires at Texas A&M and a recent fatal fire at Seton Hall University have sparked more than just flames — they have raised an eyebrow of concern about fire safety among students and University officials.

The Krueger Hall fire was the fifth dormitory fire in the nation since the spring semester began over a week ago — and the second at Texas A&M in the past fourteen months.

The Jan. 19 fire at Seton Hall claimed the lives of three students and injured 58 others. Seton Hall officials hired a firm to do a survey of colleges' fire safety, which revealed that, of the 37 colleges

surveyed, only 55 percent of dormitories were equipped with fire sprinkler systems.

Texas A&M is part of the 45 percent that is not fully equipped with fire sprinkler systems.

"As far as student rooms, at this point we don't have any rooms that are sprinkled," Dan Mizer, assistant director in the Department of Residence Life, said.

The fire in Krueger began when a towel was overheated in a microwave and thrown into a student's clothes hamper in the room.

The only sprinkler systems in dormitories on the A&M campus are in the trash chutes and trash rooms, and these systems are not in all residence halls.

The only residence halls currently equipped

with trash sprinkler systems are the Commons dorms, balcony-style dorms, and corridor-style dorms.

McInnis Hall, a balcony-style residence hall on Northside, is currently undergoing renovation. A complete sprinkler system will be installed as a part of this project. Five residence halls are scheduled for this renovation over the next several years.

"McInnis will be our test hall," Mizer said. "We will be able to determine actual cost and see how [the sprinklers] work in practice."

Texas A&M University is not the only university in Texas to realize the need for fire sprinkler systems in residence halls.

Jim Mecklin, fire safety inspector for the Uni-

versity of Texas-Austin, said UT is currently in the process of installing a sprinkler system in Jester Hall, the high-rise dormitory that houses almost 3,000 students.

"It's a retrofit, and it's difficult," Mecklin said. "It's not as easy as it is on new construction."

The project began in December 1999, and is expected to be completed in a year.

The Residence Life staff first began to take a closer look at installing fire sprinkler systems when a fire erupted on Nov. 2, 1998 on the third floor of Dorm 9, which houses part of the Corps of Cadets.

The room in which the fire originated was destroyed, and there was extensive damage to the room above it.

Mizer said adding sprinklers to the buildings will be a long, laborious process. Residence Life has taken action to improve fire safety in other ways.

"Because of that fire, we started to look at some issues that needed to be addressed," Mizer said.

Door-closing devices were installed on all doors in all halls, with the exception of halls with doors that open to the outside. If the room door is open, the device provides enough pressure to close it.

"In the Dorm 9 fire, when the fire department discovered the fire, the door was wide open,"

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Comstock no longer in critical condition

BY TRAVIS PRICHETT
The Battalion

John Comstock, the last of the victims injured in the 1999 Aggie Bonfire collapse to remain hospitalized, was upgraded from critical to serious condition yesterday.

AGGIE BONFIRE

Comstock, a freshman biotechnology major from Richardson, spent seventy days in the intensive care unit of the College Station Medical Center.

Comstock has undergone several surgeries in an effort to stabilize his condition.

In a press release, Dr. Joseph Fedorchik Jr. (who leads the team of physicians and nurses responsible for Comstock's care) said Comstock is no longer in need of respiratory support or hemodialysis, and is now able to receive nutrition by mouth.

"He has continued to make progress and has sustained the last few days without a recurrence of infections or complications," Fedorchik said.

The matter of when and where Comstock begins

rehabilitation will be decided upon in the upcoming weeks.

"I am very grateful to the staff at the Med — they are the reason I'm here today. So, when do I get to go home?"

— John Comstock

1999 Aggie Bonfire collapse victim

In the press release, Comstock expressed gratitude to the Aggie community and the Medical Center staff.

"I'm overwhelmed with the outpouring of concern from Aggies everywhere and from the community," he said.

"I'm very grateful to the staff at the Med — they are the reason I'm here today. So, when do I get to go home?"

Monkey Business



Tony Park, lead vocals/trumpet, and Howie Behrens, guitarist, of Push Monkey, work the audience into a fan frenzy at Hurricane Harry's Wednesday night. The crowd was persuaded into stage dives and mosh pits.

GUY ROGERS/THE BATTALION

300 Ags Hobby Hall coed next fall

BY RICHARD BRAY
The Battalion

Hobby Hall — an all women's residence hall on Northside — will be coed by Fall 2000, the Residence Hall Association (RHA) announced at Wednesday's meeting.

"We listen to the residents, and create legislation according to what they tell us," Julie Cast, president of RHA and a junior marketing major, said. "We talked to Northside students and they expressed a desire for more coed and male dorms."

Recent changes made by the Department of Food Services to replace Sbisca Cafeteria, closed for the semester due to extensive renovations, were also addressed at the meeting.

Council members agreed that Sbisca Hut and the expanded outbound programs were successful, but were concerned about the shortage of outbound meals on Northside on Sunday.



"Sbisca Hut was not expecting the overwhelming response from students, so they are doing better to have more options this weekend," Cindy Zawieja, associate director of Food Services, said at the meeting.

Council members also sug-

gested that signs be posted in the 12th Man International Food Court, so students can avoid confusion about where to get outbound meals for breakfast.

"The meal plan is only on the left side [of the 12th Man during breakfast] and the other side is just cash operations," Zawieja said.

Zawieja also asked the council for its opinion on the "Wheels to Meals" busing program, which provides students with busing to the MSC and the Commons.

"It's quite expensive to keep the buses running," Zawieja said. "We want responses to see if the program is working."

The council decided to postpone discussion on the matter for a few weeks to see if the busing program is necessary.

Blinn grows in Spring '00

BY DANA JAMUS
The Battalion

Texas A&M University may be slowing down in terms of admitting new students, but Blinn College is going full speed ahead.

Approximately 500 more students enrolled at Blinn's Bryan campus in fall 1999 as compared to Fall 1998, according to Barbara Pearson, vice president of Blinn College.

Only 193 additional undergraduate students enrolled at A&M in Fall 1999 as compared to Fall 1998, according to A&M's Office of Institutional Studies and Planning's Fall 1999 enrollment record. This spring semester, enrollment at Blinn increased by 680 students as compared to Spring 1999 — making the total enrollment 8,277 students. Pearson said the official enrollment is not determined until the 12th day of classes to allow for dropouts.

The additional number of students enrolled at A&M this spring is not available or distribution until the 12th day of classes, according to the Office of Planning and Institutional Research at A&M.

"One of the attractions to Blinn is that the cost of attending a junior college is always lower than a four year university," Pearson said. "Blinn charges \$27 for every

UNDERGRADUATE ENROLLMENT
BLINN

- Up by 680 in Spring 2000

Total Enrollment: 8,277
- unofficial from Blinn for Spring 2000

JEFF SMITH/THE BATTALION

credit hour and this will be rising, but there is always a limit where the cost of a college is lower than a university."

Pearson said she does not believe that Blinn is taking students away from A&M, but rather that A&M's reputation is bringing students into the area and this is having a positive effect on Blinn's student count.

Pearson said she believes that more and more students are joining Blinn's two-year program because the college is becoming more visible in the community.

Blinn has attempted to improve the registration process by cutting the waiting time and long lines that caused students frustration in the Fall 1999.

"The surge of students applying to Blinn took us by surprise in the fall," Pearson said. "The college has added extra registration days to make the process more convenient for the students."

Clinton to give last State of Union

WASHINGTON (AP) — Wedged between the Iowa caucuses and New Hampshire primary, President Clinton



CLINTON

sitting behind him at the rostrum of the cavernous House chamber. Five days before the New Hampshire primary, Gore will rush back to Washington to occupy that seat and lead the applause for Clinton.

One of the most important contributions Clinton can make to his legacy is to help Gore become president and carry on the work of the Clinton-Gore administration. It is a factor in developing Clinton's own agenda.

But on the other hand, she said, that doesn't mean Gore gets to write Clinton's script. "This is still the Clinton administration and they are very firmly in charge."

"Gore also realizes the strongest thing going for him in this election are the governing successes of the Clinton administration and the broad successes in the economy and improvements in American society," Mann said.

"It would be foolish to run away from those," he said.

Clinton also has his mind on the Senate race of his wife, Hillary. "I think she's done a good job with this and she's getting into it," he said Tuesday.

"I think it would be a good thing for New York and a good thing for our country,"

Lockhart said Clinton's administra-

tion was "not in the business of micro-managing our policies to try to help or hurt any campaign." But he acknowledged there is coordination between the Clinton and Gore teams.

"There always is. We talk to their staff all the time," Lockhart said.

"But the agenda that the president's going to lay out is the president's agenda."

The spokesman would not say how much of it came from Gore.

"There's a long list of people in that category who want things," he said, but it is the president who decides how to lay out the speech.

Clinton will offer a boost in the minimum wage, a prescription drug benefit under Medicare, tougher gun controls and a patients' bill of rights.

In health care coverage, alone, Clinton is proposing a \$110 billion initiative — saying it would be the largest investment in health coverage since Medicare was established in 1965.

Under a section headed "White House budget leaks," the committee keeps a running tab of the cost of Clinton proposals "tallied from about 50 leaks."

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