



University Fire Safety Policy

Purpose

The University of the South is committed to providing a safe living and learning environment for all students, faculty, staff, and visitors by preventing fires and promoting fire safety awareness. The University recognizes that fire incidents can significantly impact the well-being of individuals and the broader campus community and is dedicated to reducing fire-related risks through education, inspections, and enforcement of applicable fire safety requirements. This policy establishes procedures for emergency response, evacuation, accountability, and recovery, and outlines support for the health, safety, and well-being of community members before, during, and after fire-related emergencies.

Scope

All members of the University community share responsibility for maintaining a safe environment and complying with University, local, state, and federal fire safety regulations. These regulations apply to all University-owned, operated, or managed housing and facilities, including residence halls, apartments, theme housing, University-owned Greek housing, rental housing occupied by undergraduate students, and all academic, administrative, and auxiliary buildings. This policy also applies to all individuals who reside in, occupy, visit, or otherwise use University property and facilities.

Responsible Party

The Sewanee Volunteer Fire Department is the primary office responsible for implementing, administering, and enforcing the University's fire safety policies. The Office of Residential Life, Sewanee Police Department, Risk Management, Environmental Health & Safety Department, and Facilities Management also support compliance.

Definitions

Term	Definition
Fire Protection System	Facilities Management or Sewanee Fire Department-approved devices, equipment, and systems or a combination of systems used to detect a fire, activate an alarm, extinguish or control a fire, control or manage smoke, or products of a fire, or any combination thereof, including, but not limited to, smoke detectors, heat detectors, fire alarms, fire extinguishers, sprinkler systems, emergency lighting, and exit signage.
Fire Incident	Any occurrence involving flame, smoke, combustion, overheating, explosion, or other condition requiring fire department response or activation of fire protection systems.
Open Flame	Any device or source that produces a visible flame, spark, or combustion, including candles, incense, torches, oil lamps, and similar items.
Tampering	Any unauthorized interference with, damage to, misuse of, or alteration of fire protection systems.
False Fire Alarm	The unauthorized, reckless, or negligent activation of a fire protection system where no fire, smoke, emergency, or other condition requiring activation exists.
University Community	All students, faculty, staff, guests, visitors, and other individuals present in or using University-owned, operated, or controlled facilities.

Fire Safety Rules

The University community is expected to observe the following rules. Violators of these regulations or the general expectations of safe behavior are subject to fines, disciplinary action, and/or restitution. Specific penalties and disciplinary action for violations of this policy are found under “Accountability and Enforcement.”

1. General

- a. Smoking, including vaporizers, hookahs, e-cigarettes, etc., is prohibited in all University-owned or controlled facilities, including University vehicles and

residence halls, and is also prohibited within 50 feet of the entrance to any facility.

- b. The unauthorized possession, ignition, or detonation of any object or article that would cause damage by fire or other means to persons or property, or possession of any substance which could be considered to be, is prohibited.
- c. Sounding of false fire alarms or tampering with fire fighting/safety equipment, including but not limited to fire extinguishers, connecting pipes, exit signs, and the alarm system, is prohibited.
- d. Doors shall not be propped open or otherwise prevented from closing, except as authorized by a University official, as such actions may compromise fire safety measures and building security.
- e. Any action that impairs the operation of fire protection systems, including covering smoke detectors, removing detector batteries, obstructing sprinkler discharge, or tampering with fire alarms or sprinkler systems, is prohibited.

2. Exit Ways and Building Corridors

- a. Buildings designed for human occupancy must have continuous, unobstructed means of egress to permit prompt evacuation of occupants and to allow necessary access for responding emergency personnel.
- b. The use of chains, padlocks, barricades, or other devices that prevent immediate egress from occupied buildings is prohibited. Normal locking hardware installed and operated in accordance with applicable fire and building codes is permitted.
- c. Corridors must not be used for storage. The intent is to keep exits free of all obstructions and combustible materials.
- d. Storage of furniture, equipment, bicycles, battery-powered scooters or e-bikes, trunks, boxes, drying racks, or anything else is not permitted in corridors or stairwells.
- e. All stairways must remain clear at all times.
- f. Emergency-only exits shall remain unobstructed and shall not be used for routine ingress or egress except during emergencies, fire drills, or other authorized circumstances.
- g. Streets, fire lanes, fire hydrants, and designated egress walkways from building exits to a public way must remain clear and unobstructed for emergency vehicles, personnel, and occupants.

3. Electrical Panels

- a. Electrical panels must remain readily accessible at all times. A minimum of three feet of unobstructed clearance shall be maintained in front of all electrical panel doors, and no furniture, storage, equipment, or other materials may block access to the panels or impede the ability to fully open the panel door.

- b. Rooms containing electrical panels may be secured for normal building security, provided authorized personnel and emergency responders can gain timely access without unnecessary delay.
- 4. Combustible/Flammable Materials
 - a. Combustible materials shall be kept to a minimum and stored in an orderly manner. Excessive accumulations of combustible materials, including but not limited to paper, cardboard, lumber, wood products, Styrofoam, packaging materials, and similar items, that, in the professional judgment of the Fire Chief or their designee, constitute a fire or life safety hazard are prohibited inside buildings.
 - b. Flammable and combustible liquids shall not be stored inside residential buildings. In other University buildings, these materials may only be stored in a UL-approved flammable storage cabinet or other approved storage area designed for flammable materials. Academic laboratories and maintenance facilities may store quantities exceeding 2.5 gallons when stored in an approved flammable storage cabinet and in accordance with applicable fire and life safety codes.
 - c. Storage of combustible materials shall not obstruct exits, corridors, stairwells, electrical panels, mechanical equipment, or fire protection equipment. Any rags with oil or solvent must only be stored in a listed metal container designed for rag storage.
- 5. Electrical Cords
 - a. All electrical cords must be maintained in good repair, without splices or fraying. Broken or damaged cords must be replaced.
 - b. All electrical cords must be certified by a Nationally Recognized Testing Laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL).
 - c. Electrical cords shall not be used in place of permanent wiring. Electrical cords should not run through doors, windows, or other openings in walls, floors, or ceilings.
 - d. Electrical cords shall not be used outside the room where the receptacle is located. The only exception is qualified technicians performing maintenance.
 - e. All electrical cords shall be properly grounded when in use and must have a grounding conductor.
 - f. Multiple-outlet plug adapters are prohibited.
 - g. Only one power strip is permitted per outlet, and extension cords must not be used in succession or in conjunction with power strips.
 - h. Only three (3)-prong extension cords six (6) feet or less in length, certified by a Nationally Recognized Testing Laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL), are permitted in residential rooms.
 - i. If more than two (2) appliances with a cumulative wattage exceeding 1500 watts are plugged into a single wall outlet, a power strip certified by a Nationally

Recognized Testing Laboratory, such as Underwriters Laboratories (UL), with a built-in circuit breaker must be used.

6. Electrical Tools and Appliances

- a. Powered equipment, such as electrical tools or appliances, must be grounded or double-insulated.
- b. Combustible materials must be eighteen (18) inches or more away from any light bulb or electrical appliance.
- c. Appliance Requirements:
 - i. Within residence halls and University-owned Greek houses, rice cookers, waffle makers, griddles, and air fryers are permitted for use only in common kitchens.
 - ii. All appliances must be maintained in good repair, approved by Underwriters Laboratories (UL), and in compliance with the National Electrical Code.
 - iii. Cooking equipment shall not be left unattended while in operation.
 - iv. Appliances found to be unsafe shall be removed.
 - v. Appliances shall be placed on non-combustible surfaces no closer than eighteen (18) inches from any combustibles.
 - vi. Possession of a prohibited appliance shall constitute a violation regardless of whether the appliance is plugged in or actively being used.

7. Decorations and Displays

- a. Hanging or suspending any material or items from the ceiling, overhead lights, smoke detectors, fire alarm devices, any pipes, or sprinkler heads is prohibited. Signs, flags, banners, posters, letters, window paint, or any other display or decoration are prohibited from hanging or being displayed on or in the window.
- b. In residence halls, University-owned Greek housing, theme housing, rental housing occupied by undergraduates, or other University residence facilities, only non-adhesive LED decorative, battery-powered lights are permitted.
- c. Electric decorative light sets may not be hung from ceilings, pipes, sprinkler heads, or run through or under door frames or windows. They also may not be anchored or touch metal items, including but not limited to metal windows, pipes, or door frames.
- d. A clearance of 24 inches shall be maintained below all automatic fire sprinkler detectors. In buildings without an automatic fire sprinkler system, no materials may be stored within 18 inches of the ceiling.

8. Special Events with Fire

- a. Any fire, bonfire, ceremonial fire, or other event involving an open flame on University property must be registered and approved by the Sewanee Volunteer Fire Department Chief or their designee prior to the event using the [Events with Fire Registration Form](#).

- b. Any organization or individual hosting an approved event with fire must complete fire safety training through the Sewanee Volunteer Fire Department prior to the event.
- c. Fires will not be permitted during dry spells or inclement weather, and may be canceled by the fire chief if weather conditions warrant.
- d. No accelerants shall be used to start the fire, nor may any be present at the fire scene. Only commercially manufactured fire-starting products specifically designed for the intended use may be used to ignite recreational fires or charcoal grills. The use of gasoline, diesel fuel, lighter fluid, or other unauthorized flammable or combustible liquids as fire accelerants is prohibited.
- e. Fires may only be constructed from natural wood or untreated lumber and started with paper, cardboard, kindling, or a starter log.
- f. Fires must be at least twenty-five (25) feet from the nearest structure, including vehicles, unless approved by the fire chief.
- g. A designated fire master must remain completely sober for the duration of the fire. This person shall be in charge of the fire and will be designated on the event registration form.
- h. Horseplay, chicken fighting, wrestling, fire-walking, or fire jumping is not permitted.
- i. Burning of trash, electronics, furniture, rugs, pillows, tires, bikes, treated/glued woods, crossties, kegs, or other materials is not permitted.
- j. A water hose must be present, connected to a sufficient water supply, and capable of reaching the fire.
- k. Any approved fire shall be continuously monitored and must be fully extinguished before the responsible party leaves the area. A fire shall be considered fully extinguished only when no flames, embers, smoke, or other signs of combustion remain.

Prohibited Items

1. Open Flames

- a. Items that require an open flame to operate or that are designed to produce heat are not permitted in residence halls. The following items are prohibited:
 - i. All flammable liquids (gasoline, kerosene, diesel fuels, lighter fluids, charcoal, propane, etc.)
 - ii. All items powered by combustible fuels (gas motorized bicycles, motorcycles, etc.)
 - iii. Smoke/fog/haze/bubble machines
- b. Lighting such as tiki lamps, oil lamps, torches, etc., is absolutely prohibited in all University facilities. The use of candles and the burning of incense or other

flammable substances in all University facilities except All Saints' Chapel, the Chapel of the Apostles, and St Luke's Chapel is prohibited.

2. Fireworks, Explosives, and Flammable Items

- a. Fireworks, firecrackers, flares, and explosives of any kind are prohibited from all University residence halls, Greek, theme, and rental housing facilities.
- b. Students are not permitted to possess fireworks or similar items while on campus.

3. Portable Electrical Equipment

- a. With the exception of one microwave (with a maximum wattage of 800 watts) and one mini fridge (no larger than 4.4 cubic feet per bedroom), the following appliances are prohibited in any residence hall, Greek, or theme house room:
 - i. Slow cookers, crockpots, pressure cookers, bread makers, stand-alone freezers, coffee makers without an auto shut-off feature, and multi-cookers
- b. Any appliance with an open flame or burner, including but not limited to hot plates, electric skillets, toasters, toaster ovens, countertop-style grills/camp stoves, sandwich makers, deep fryers, and woks, is prohibited in residence halls, Greek housing, theme housing, rental housing occupied by undergraduates, or other University residence facilities.
- c. Space heaters, window units/portable air conditioners, portable fans, electric heaters, kerosene heaters, and similar items not issued by Facilities Management or the Office of Residential Life are not permitted in University-owned buildings and facilities.
 - i. Facilities Management or the Office of Residential Life may issue and/or authorize the temporary use of such equipment during extreme weather, emergencies, or other circumstances determined appropriate by the University.
- d. Lithium-ion battery-powered scooters, electric bicycles, hoverboards, Segways, and other electric riding devices are not permitted to be stored, charged, or operated within University facilities.

4. Furniture

- a. No upholstered furniture that has significant cuts or ruptures in the upholstery shall be permitted in the residence halls.
- b. Furniture provided in University housing is designed to meet fire safety and building code requirements. Students must not alter, dismantle, or rearrange furniture in ways that reduce safety, obstruct exits or evacuation routes, or create fire hazards. Any concerns regarding damaged or unsafe furniture should be reported promptly to the Office of Residential Life or Facilities Management.
- c. Cardboard boxes and boxes of like materials may not be stored in the attics of residence halls, Greek housing, and theme housing, and may not accumulate in any area of academic and administrative buildings.

5. Decorations and Displays

- a. Candle/oil warmers, potpourri pots, paraffin baths, incense, and any open flame are prohibited in residence halls.
- b. Halogen lamps, sun lamps, lava lamps, or other similar heat-producing bulbs or heat-producing decorative items are prohibited in residence halls, Greek housing, theme housing, rental housing occupied by undergraduates, or other University residence facilities.
- c. Natural holiday trees, wreaths, cornstalks, hay, pumpkins, or other dried plants/vegetation are prohibited in residence halls, University-owned Greek housing, theme housing, rental housing occupied by undergraduates, or other University residence facilities, unless approved by the Office of Residential Life.
- d. Decorations or postings of materials of any kind that cover residence hall room numbers or prevent access to the locking mechanism or doorknob are prohibited.

Fire Protection Systems

University of the South facilities are equipped with an array of fire safety and monitoring equipment designed to protect people and property. Fire alarms, extinguishers, smoke detectors, exit signage, and emergency lighting are provided to mitigate the likelihood and severity of fire in University facilities and to enable efficient evacuation should it become necessary. These items are of critical importance and are maintained and monitored by the University. Tampering with or disabling such equipment is unlawful and puts lives at risk.

Emergency Evacuation Procedures

All campus individuals are responsible for knowing evacuation routes, participating in fire drills, and reporting hazards. In the event of a fire or the sounding of fire alarms, immediate evacuation is mandatory, and reentry to a building is prohibited until the proper clearance is issued. Fire evacuation gathering points are posted in all residential facilities. Individuals requiring assistance during evacuations should develop Personal Emergency Evacuation Plans (PEEPs) through the Office of Residential Life (students) or Human Resources (faculty/staff) to ensure their safe evacuation. The University coordinates with local emergency responders using the Incident Command System (ICS), and Unified Command shall be established during significant incidents. In the event of fires or the sounding of fire alarms, the following actions shall be taken:

1. Immediately evacuate through the nearest exit, close doors, and activate the fire alarm system (if not already activated) as you leave.
 - a. Before opening a door to a corridor, feel the door and touch the doorknob with the back of the hand to ensure that neither is unusually warm. If the door and knob are not unusually warm, open the door cautiously, and be prepared to close it immediately.

- b. Proceed to stairwells and exits. If you encounter smoke at any point during the evacuation, drop to the floor to minimize its effects and crawl to your exit.
 - c. Elevators are not to be used during evacuation, as elevator shafts can fill with smoke, causing occupants to asphyxiate.
2. If you cannot evacuate your room, place towels, jackets, or coats at the base of the door and dampen them with water, if possible.
 - a. Hang a towel or other device out of the window to signal to emergency personnel that the room remains occupied.
 - b. If smoke fills the room, open the window to the extent that you can breathe air from the exterior.
3. Once safely outside a building, it is expected to immediately report all fires, regardless of size (even if extinguished), smoke, or fire alarm activations to 911 as soon as it is safe to do so.
4. Move away from the building and go to the building's Evacuation Gathering Point. Evacuation Gathering Points for all University facilities are available on the [University Online Campus Map](#).
5. Do not return to the building until authorized to do so by emergency personnel.
6. Members of the University community affected by fire-related incidents may be eligible for assistance and support services, as appropriate.

Fire Exit Drills

The purpose of conducting fire exit drills is to ensure the safe and efficient evacuation of a building in an emergency while maintaining order and control and preventing panic. Speed in emptying a building, while desirable, is not the objective of a fire exit drill and should be considered secondary. The following rules and procedures shall be followed when conducting a fire exit drill:

1. Each residence hall shall conduct a minimum of two (2) fire exit drills each semester. One shall be announced, and notice given to all building staff and residents. One shall be unannounced without notice to either the building staff or residents.
2. The facility manager or building director of any facility conducting both announced and unannounced fire exit drills shall notify University Dispatch and the Fire Department of the time and location of the drill no less than one hour prior to the start of the exit drill.
3. Residential Life staff and proctors in each building shall be responsible for instructing the occupants during new student orientation that the entire building is to be one hundred percent (100%) evacuated in an emergency or when a fire alarm sounds.
4. One hundred percent (100%) evacuation of occupants of a building is required in the event of a fire alarm or fire.
5. It should be assumed that all fire alarms are for actual fires. Staff and students who fail to evacuate the building appropriately may be subject to disciplinary action.

6. Portable fire extinguishers, for use by authorized and trained personnel, are located in campus buildings in compliance with applicable codes. In the event of a fire or fire alarm, the number one priority for all other persons is to evacuate the building immediately and safely.

Fire Safety Prevention and Education

Fire prevention is the shared responsibility of every member of the University community. The University has established fire-prevention policies and regulations, but cannot anticipate every possible scenario that might lead to a fire.

1. Residence Hall Inspections

Residence halls and other University-owned or managed residential facilities shall be periodically inspected to identify and address fire hazards, ensure compliance with fire safety requirements, and verify the proper operation of fire protection systems and equipment. Only authorized University personnel may enter University facilities to conduct fire safety inspections and remove prohibited items.

2. Fire Safety Education

The University shall provide fire safety education and awareness programming to students and other members of the University community to promote safe practices, emergency preparedness, and compliance with fire safety regulations. Fire safety information, including emergency evacuation procedures, prohibited items, and fire prevention practices, shall be incorporated into new student orientation and onboarding programs.

3. Control of Ignition Sources and Hazardous Materials

The possession, use, storage, and disposal of ignition sources, flammable materials, and other hazardous substances shall be conducted in accordance with University policies, applicable laws, and fire code requirements.

4. Annual Review

This policy shall be reviewed annually by Residential Life, Greek Life, Dean of Students, HR, Environmental Health and Safety, Risk Management Offices, and the Sewanee Volunteer Fire Department to ensure continued compliance with applicable laws, regulations, and best practices.

Reporting

Policies are reviewed annually and updated when appropriate. The University is required to annually disclose statistical data on all fires that occur in on-campus student housing facilities in the University Annual Fire Safety and Security Report. The fire safety log can be reviewed at the Sewanee Volunteer Fire Department or the Sewanee Police Department. The Annual Fire Safety and Security Report, in accordance with the Jeanne Clery Disclosure of Campus Security Policy

and Campus Crime Statistics Act, is required to include the three (3) most recent calendar years of statistics.

Accountability and Enforcement

Tampering with, vandalizing, or misusing fire safety equipment is prohibited. Anyone who issues a false fire alarm or tampers with fire safety equipment in any University facility may be prosecuted under the law and may also be subject to University-imposed disciplinary measures or other sanctions.

1. False Alarms and Tampering with Fire Safety Equipment

- a. It is unlawful for any person to remove, tamper with, or otherwise disturb any fire extinguisher, fire protection, or life safety system or equipment, except for the purpose of extinguishing a fire.
- b. Organizations and/or individuals found responsible for deliberately activating the fire alarm system for reasons other than fire prevention will be fined a minimum of \$500 to cover the cost of emergency response and personnel.
- c. Falsely reporting an emergency situation that results in public panic or evacuation is considered a Class C felony and carries a penalty of two (2) to fifteen (15) years in prison and fines up to \$10,000 (Tenn. Code Ann. § 39-16-502(a)(3)).

2. Arson and Property Damage

- a. The intentional destruction of University or personal property by means of fire or explosion may constitute arson and/or vandalism under Tennessee state law.
- b. Individuals found responsible for fire-related property damage may be required to pay restitution for the repair or replacement of damaged property, including but not limited to furniture, fixtures, equipment, and other University-owned or personal property.
- c. The classification of arson, vandalism, and related property offenses as felonies or misdemeanors is governed by Tennessee law, including the Tennessee Code Annotated § 39-14-301 through 39-14-304 and 39-14-408.
- d. Individuals found in possession of fireworks, firecrackers, flares, and explosives of any kind will be fined a minimum of \$300.

The University may refer suspected violations involving arson, vandalism, false reporting of a fire or emergency, tampering with fire protection systems, or other criminal conduct to appropriate law enforcement authorities for investigation and prosecution. Criminal proceedings and University disciplinary proceedings may occur independently of one another. The contents of this policy do not limit the University's authority to impose disciplinary sanctions regardless of whether criminal charges are filed or criminal penalties are imposed.