Campus Personal Safety Committee Report 2006-2007

Committee Members

Kerrie Bondi, *Career Counselor*
Charlie Buche, *Safety Aids*
Lauren Doyle, *Residence Director*
Anastasia Emerson, *student*
Daniel Fitzgibbons, *student*
Kim Harvey, *Area Coordinator*
Sam Hyken, *Jones Hall Resident Assistant*
Janie Lewis, *Assistant Professor of Biology*
Dave Norton, *Facilities Services*
Bilgehan Onogul, *G.F.R. member*
Jennifer Rogalsky, *Assistant Professor of Geography*
Mary Caitlin Scanlan, *student*
Emily Schule, *Allegany Hall Resident Assistant*
Joe VanRemmen, *University Police – Co-Chair*
Kristen Wolbart, *G.F.R. member*
Joan Zook, *Assistant Professor of Psychology – Co-Chair*

The committee was charged by President Dahl to:

1. Evaluate the impact of the completion of the Letchworth Road construction project from the vantage point of campus personal safety.
2. Examine safety issues related to student after-hours access to instructional facilities.
3. Explore safety issues related to the egress of persons who are disabled from campus buildings during emergencies.
4. Review the prevalence of fire alarm activations in the residence halls and recommend a means of minimizing the frequency of sounding of non-emergency alarms.
5. Review the prevalence of circuit breakers tripping in the residence halls and recommend a means of minimizing the frequency of the tripping in non-emergency situations.

Charge #1 – Letchworth Road Project

The committee discussed the current problem of many pedestrians walking in the roadway to go up the hill between the south side of Schrader and the College Union and considered several options for the placement of a sidewalk in the area with the help of Dave Norton.

- One option was the construction of stairs up the middle of the hill in front of the College Union entrance. Disadvantages of this option included greater maintenance necessary for stairs (e.g., snow removal) and concerns about its use because it is not the most direct route.
- We also considered the construction of a sidewalk along the south side of the road. Disadvantages of this option included construction difficulties faced with the steep grade on the hillside and the presence of some trees and concerns about pedestrians crossing the driveway for service vehicles.
- The final option considered, and the one the committee recommends, is the construction of a sidewalk along the north side of the roadway leading up the hill. (See the attached planning diagram. The proposed path is highlighted in yellow.) The main disadvantage of this path is that involves crossing the roadway twice, however, we believe it is the best option because it is the most direct route for pedestrians and is the most practical from a construction perspective.

Charge #2 – Student After-Hours Access to Instructional Facilities

The committee discussed at length the safety issues involved when students worked in academic buildings after hours. We began our discussion by distributing a survey to the department heads. The responses from the survey indicated that there is a need for students to have access to certain buildings after hours, particularly in the science buildings, Fraiser, and Brodie. (Complete results from the survey are attached.) The primary safety concerns that emerged were (1) unsupervised use of potentially dangerous chemicals and tools, primarily in the science labs and art studios, (2) potential for criminal activity associated with non-authorized individuals gaining access to the buildings late at night.

We recommend the following:

- Students who need to have access to academic facilities after hours should be issued a pass from their department. We recommend that a standard pass be created that will be used by all departments. This will make it easier for University Police, custodial staff, or others who encounter students in the buildings after hours to verify that the student has permission to be on the premises.
- We recommend that each department specify particular information (policies, safety procedures, etc.) to be included on the back of the standard pass. This information should include emergency phone numbers.
- It is our understanding that all the academic buildings will be equipped with programmable card key passes this summer. Students who have been granted passes by their department we will able to have their cards programmed to allow access to the appropriate building.
- We recognize that unforeseen problems and glitches in the card key pass system for the academic buildings are likely and recommend that its implementation be evaluated by next year's safety committee.

Charge #3 – Egress of Disabled Persons From Buildings During Emergencies

The committee inspected both academic buildings and residence halls from the vantage point of a disabled person attempting to leave the building in the case of an emergency such as a fire. Because elevators are not functional during emergencies, individuals in wheelchairs or others who cannot go down stairs need to have access to an area of refuge until emergency personnel arrive to get them out. Areas of refuge, typically

stairwells, have doors that close them off from the rest of the building, protecting individuals in them from the spread of fire and smoke.

Our inspection verified that all the buildings had areas of refuge that were equipped with magnetic doors that automatically close when fire alarms are activated. We also learned that disabled students are housed in Monroe Hall in a “medical single,” and that emergency personnel are aware of the locations of these rooms when evacuating individuals during emergencies. After our investigation, we concluded that the campus is adequately equipped to deal with the egress of disabled individuals from buildings during emergencies and we do not recommend any changes.

Charge #4 – Fire Alarm Activations

The committee obtained records of fire alarm activations in the residence halls and their causes from January 1 to December 31, 2006. The Saratoga townhouses accounted for the majority of the activations (61). In all halls, the primary causes of the fire alarms were related to burnt food during cooking, often because the food (especially microwave popcorn) was left unattended. (The complete records are attached.) Smoke from burnt food is less likely to set off fire alarms if fans and vents over stoves are in operation. Therefore, the committee recommends the following:

- Install vents in the kitchens of the Saratoga townhouses that turn on automatically when the stove is in operation.
- If automatic vents are not feasible, we recommend that the residence halls implement a policy requiring students to use vents while cooking on stoves. In addition, we recommend that the policy require students to stay in the kitchen area while their food is cooking. Ideally, these policies will be posted on a placard in the kitchen areas of the residence halls.
- Although not a formal recommendation, the committee encourages the residence hall staff to develop some creative programming to educate students about cooking, such as classes, contests, etc.

Charge #5 – Circuit Breaker Trippings

The committee obtained records (attached) of circuit breaker trippings in the residence halls. We learned from Dave Norton that the circuit breakers are acting as they should. What often causes the circuit breakers to trip are sparks that occur when an individual pulls an appliance out of a plug while it is turned on. The solution to this problem involves educating residents about the need to turn off lamps, televisions, etc. before unplugging them. The committee recommends that residence hall staff inform students about this issue, perhaps during orientation, hall meetings, or other mechanism.

Other Issues

The committee was approached by Catherine Urban, a student who was temporarily disabled and on crutches this year, to explore the college’s policies regarding helping disabled students get to and from classes. She had already researched some of the policies in place at other SUNY schools and had compiled a list of

recommendations (see attached). Since Catherine came to us after our last meeting of the years, we were unable to address her concerns. However, we suggest that next year's committee explore this issue and evaluate the feasibility of her recommendations.