

BC Acts on Fire Safety Request

By Marcella Bombardieri, Globe Staff, 3/29/2000=20

In the wake of a Boston College dormitory fire last week that sent eight people to the hospital, the state fire marshal's office has told school officials to remove the type of window screens it had used in its 28 dormitories in Newton and Boston, according to Boston College.

Workers have been removing the protective screens since Friday, and BC expects all of them to be out of the dorms by today, said BC spokesman Jack Dunn.

The company that manufactures the screens also supplies screens to other area universities, including Harvard, Tufts, and Brown, as well as the Boston Public Schools.

While trying to battle Friday's early morning blaze, firefighters had difficulty chopping their way through the heavy-duty screens with their axes, Dunn said.

"Often, fires are learning opportunities," Dunn said. "It was only after the fire that they realized how difficult the screens were to penetrate."

Dunn said BC was not technically in violation of the fire code, but that school officials are eager to comply with the fire marshal.

"We'll do whatever the fire marshal's office tells us to do," Dunn said. "There's nothing more important than the safety of our students."

State Fire Marshal Stephen Coan would only say that results of the investigation into the fire, due to be released this morning, would address window screens.

The blaze in the Cardinal Medeiros dormitory for freshmen was traced to a faulty plug strip in a third-floor room, Coan said last week. About a half-dozen students were rescued either from their rooms or from the roof; 37 had to move elsewhere.

Eight people were taken to hospitals for treatment. Of the six students hospitalized, three were released Friday and two on Saturday. The most seriously injured student, who suffered neck burns and was found unconscious in his room by firefighters, was released Monday. Two BC security officers were also hospitalized.

The security screens are made by Kane Manufacturing Corp. of Kane, Pa., Dunn said.

According to Kane's website, the company's screens are used by 30 colleges nationwide.

It was not immediately clear if any or all of these schools use the same screens as Boston College. Kane officials could not be reached for comment late yesterday.

The college has asked the local company that installed the security screens if it can retrofit them to slide open from the inside, so they would comply with the latest fire codes, Dunn said.

In the meantime, students will have no screens in their windows, so "if they open the window there's nothing to keep out birds, insects or raccoons," Dunn said.

"It's a difficult call to balance safety and security issues," he added.

According to Dunn, the faulty plug strip suspected of causing the fire is not sold at the campus store.

"We're looking into ways to make sure no one brings this type of plug strip onto campus again," Dunn said.

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