

Campus life revives, but is it still safe for students?

As university students start returning to campuses and residences after a long absence due to Covid-19 restrictions, the issue of fire-safety requirements for student accommodation is again being highlighted.



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“Fire-safety requirements for student accommodation are by nature more onerous than other building types,” comments ASP Fire CEO Michael van Niekerk.

This is because any building in which rooms are rented out as accommodation is deemed to be on par with a hotel. As it is a densely populated residential environment, such a building must comply with all regulations and standards. In terms of fire safety, fires can be dealt with through three main actions: Controlling the growth of a fire to prevent it from spreading, suppressing a fire to cool it rapidly, and finally extinguishing a fire so that no heated substances remain.

Evacuation should be safe and easy and allow unrestricted access for emergency services. Fire-detection systems must be installed to be able to detect any fire as soon as possible, thereby warning occupants to allow them to exit in time.



Fire safety is a burning issue

Lauren Salt 5 Apr 2017



“Buildings that accommodate large numbers of people are often not designed with specific occupant characteristics in mind,” stresses van Niekerk. ASP Fire not only offers its fire engineering expertise for new buildings, but can also bring existing non-compliant buildings, especially older buildings, up to standard.

Moreover, historic buildings that accommodate residents, or that are converted to accommodate residents, pose a particular challenge in that they often lack modern fire-safety elements vital for the safe evacuation of residents, or to prevent fire or smoke from spreading rapidly throughout the building.

Looking at the latest trends in the property-development market, van Niekerk points to the current largescale repurposing of commercial and even industrial buildings into long-term residential units. Another trend is an increased demand for affordable student accommodation, such as the refurbishment of the Hatfield Square mixed-use student accommodation in Pretoria, designed by the Paragon Group for owners and developers Respublica and Redefine.

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