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News

Busby reports additional fire, safety equipment tampering as potential arson investigation continues

By **Alison Cross** · February 26, 2021

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Busby Suites encountered suspicious fires in Feb 5th and Feb 18, 2021. Photo by Matt Harrison/The Daily Campus.

The first Busby fire occurred Feb. 5, the second Feb. 17 and the vandalism Feb. 18.

As authorities continue their investigation of last week's [suspicious fires](#) on campus, the Busby hall director announced on Tuesday an additional fire occurred earlier this month outside the residence hall and emergency equipment was vandalized, leaving Busby residents expressing concern over the delayed communication of community safety threats.

In an email sent to Busby residents on Feb. 23, hall director Karen Lohr revealed a recycling dumpster was set on fire on Feb. 5, nearly two weeks before the garbage can fire outside the Busby bus stop was reported in the campus-wide crime alert along with two separate fires on Feb. 17. Lohr also said the following day, Busby staff found exit signs missing and an emergency light damaged. The Feb. 18 vandalism incident was never reported to the University of Connecticut Police Department, according to UCPD Deputy Chief Andrew Fournier.

Associate Director of Residence Education Sheila Morgansmith said the destruction of fire safety equipment was reported internally to Residential Life, per department procedures.

The Feb. 23 email was the first communication residents received concerning the Feb. 5 fire or the Feb. 18 vandalism.

"I appreciate my hall director's transparency with the situation, albeit slightly delayed," said Ella Byrne, a sixth-semester animal science major. "The fact that we weren't immediately made aware of problems with emergency preparedness equipment doesn't sit right with me."

Byrne has lived in Busby since the fall semester, and like other residents, she said she feels worried about her safety.

"I really want to believe that this is a series of unrelated incidents and not an arsonist because I want to trust my fellow residents ... I'm not shaken easily, but this really got to me," Byrne said. "I'm seriously considering moving back home if another incident occurs."

Fournier said that the UCPD continues to investigate whether these incidents are connected.

"At approximately 2 a.m. on Feb. 5, a witness reported a fire in a dumpster just west of Busby Suites, which was quickly extinguished. On Feb. 17, between the hours of 3:30 a.m. to 5 a.m., three fires were reported including in a dumpster outside of Busby Suites, a dumpster at Wheeler Hall, and a portable bathroom on Discovery Drive. All of these incidents resulted in property damage only," Fournier said. "These fires are still being actively investigated in order to identify those responsible. We encourage residents who live in these areas to be vigilant in reporting any suspicious activity or persons in the area."

Fournier said because the Feb. 5 fire was a "single occurrence," UCPD did not believe the incident required a "timely warning notice" mandated by the Jeanne Clery Act, which stipulates that universities alert students of crimes when the crime poses a continuing threat.

People with information related to these crimes are encouraged to report by calling UCPD at 860-486-4800 or emailing crimealerts@uconn.edu.

"The behaviors displayed in these repeated incidents are unacceptable and must cease immediately," wrote Lohr in the email to Busby residents. "We are committed to getting to the bottom of this and holding those responsible accountable."

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