



The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill

Unsupervised Bonfires on Franklin Street Following Men's Basketball Victories

Background: In the past several years members of the University community, particularly students and alumni, converge on Franklin Street following men's basketball victories, in particular after any victory of Duke or after winning the NCAA Championship.

These celebrations are largely controlled with one glaring and dangerous exception: the lighting of unsupervised bonfires on Franklin Street and adjoining public and University property. Once lit, students and others then jump through these bonfires at great risk to themselves.

The North Carolina Jaycee Burn Center has admitted several individuals as a result of these activities, many with serious burn injuries. After the NCAA Championship in 2005, 11 patients were seen in the UNC emergency room and 4 were admitted with hospital charges ranging from \$3,000 to \$19,000.

The Town Manager of Chapel Hill issued a report in May 2006 to the Chapel Hill Town Council on "Town Sponsored Events Involving Large Crowds". This report cites that the most common citizen complaints after these events are the bonfires on Franklin Street and injuries associated with them. The report requests that the Town work with University officials to prevent such fires in the future.

Unfortunately there is a perception that such fires are part of a long standing tradition that cannot be changed. This simply is not the case.

At NCSU during a UNC Basketball Ticket Campout in 2000 there were numerous unsupervised fires. A report commissioned by NCSU recommended that such activity stop in the future. The NCSU student government embraced this recommendation and clearly state in their ticket information site that "no fires are allowed" during the Ticket Campout.

At Duke, there has been a tradition of starting bonfires on the Main Quad after major basketball victories; however in 2001 and 2005 the Durham County fire marshal revoked the bonfire permit because of safety violations. In a 2005, students wrote an editorial in their paper that "Bonfire permits are the best way for the University to maintain order following basketball games that students have reason to celebrate. It is everyone's responsibility—students and administrators—to make sure that bonfires stay a fun, safe Duke tradition."

It is essential that UNC adopt a similar attitude in order to ensure that unsupervised, illegal and dangerous bonfires are not sanctioned or supported by the University community.