

Fire hazards remain uncorrected

by Debby Fairley
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Twelve years ago, the University of Nebraska's two Lincoln campuses were given a thorough fire safety inspection by the state fire marshal's office.

Four buildings were condemned. Fifty-one others did not comply with state fire safety standards. Only eight were approved as "relatively free from fire hazards."

That 1960 state inspection was apparently the last given the city campus.

The buildings were inspected during the summer of 1960. According to the fire marshal's records, the University was then notified it had until Sept. 1 to correct the hazards, "under penalty of law."

Handwritten notes jotted on the reports show some buildings later were brought into partial compliance—Morrill Hall, for example, has an OK written next to one of six hazards listed.

The basis for those scattered OK's were letters from University officials reporting on repairs.

"For some reason, there was never any thorough recheck made by state inspectors," said State Fire Marshal Joe L. Pluta.

Although few buildings have been brought into total compliance during the 12 years since that inspection, no legal action has been taken by the fire marshal's office.

If hazards are not corrected within the time allowed, and if a further extension is not granted, the case may be taken to the county attorney, who decides whether to file charges. Then it is up to the court to decide whether to impose a fine.

State law provides for a fine of not less than \$5 and not more than \$100 a day for each violation.

Had the University violations been taken to court Sept. 1, 1960, and had the court assessed the minimum fine of \$5 a day, the University would now owe approximately \$22,000 for each building still containing hazards found in 1960.

In many buildings, the hazards still exist.

A preliminary check of the Temple Building, brought about by Daily Nebraskan inquiries, turned up some of the same violations cited in the 1960 report, including too-narrow fire escapes and the lack of either sprinkler or automatic fire detection system.

The 1960 Temple report listed six hazards and concluded: "From a fire safety standpoint, this building is in a very poor condition."

Last week's preliminary examination listed 16 safety violations.

The University was given 15 days to completely check Temple's "potentially very hazardous" wiring, according to Pluta.

The inspecting officer also recommended the entire third floor be closed to classes. If that is impossible, said Pluta, the number of seats per room would have to be cut.

"Now that the University has been called to our attention, I think we're going to get every building checked, starting Sept. 25," said Pluta.

In 1968, a building inspection was made of East Campus, resulting in a list of 130 fire safety hazards. Records of corrections of those hazards also show only partial corrections.

On city campus, except for piecemeal (fire alarm installations or remodeling), buildings have not been



given a complete inspection in 12 years—despite Pluta's policy of "liking to check schools every year." Pluta, who took office 19 months ago, said his predecessors left him "no word of anything too hazardous."

Since then, his inspectors have been working their way down a priority list, he said; hospitals, nursing homes, child care homes, then schools.

"We've had a University inspection in the back of our minds for some time, but no, this (the Sept. 25 all-campus inspection) had not been planned previously," he said.

However, the two campuses are checked every year by University inspectors, according to Physical Plant Administrator George R. Miller.

"We review and make new estimates on every building every year," he said. "Then we make a list of priorities and do what we can with the funds available."

But there isn't enough, he said. "It might take \$100,000 to \$200,000 to update Temple Building alone," he said. "We have to decide whether the building is worth the cost of renovating. . . I think the general consensus has been, no, it's not."

"It all comes down to priorities—do we put fire alarms in Temple or do we put a roof on the Law College? We do the most critical problems first."

In 1960, it was estimated that the indicated repairs would cost \$1.6 million. Refusal to carry out previous recommendations was cited by the fire safety inspector as the chief factor for the high cost of bringing the buildings up to standard.

Because of doubled construction costs and higher safety standards, Miller estimated that today's cost for those same corrections might be triple the \$1.6 million total.

"All major fire safety improvements must come out of the capital improvements part of our budget," he said. "This year the Legislature gave us \$25,000 to work with for both campuses."

"For all of special maintenance costs, we have \$325,000—and that has to cover new roofs, leaky windows, fire doors. . . a multitude of things. There just isn't much money."



Temple . . . "From a fire safety standpoint this building is in a very poor condition."

NOVA submits fund proposal

UNL officials have decided to submit a proposal to the federal government to re-establish the NOVA (Nebraska Opportunity for Volunteers in Action) program, according to Dr. Ed Kelley, a local NOVA organizer.

Funds for the NOVA program were suspended this fall because program planning was not completed in time for the beginning of the fall semester. The University has been asked to resubmit a proposal for a January starting date.

Kelley, who will be responsible for the

development and direction of both the proposal and program, said the single biggest issue which caused the federal government to suspend NOVA funds for this fall was that not enough students had been recruited.

The original proposal had designated 60 students be recruited for the program, he said. Federal regulations require that the program come within 10 per cent, 54 students, of the proposed number to receive federal funds. Only 44 students had been recruited by the fall deadline, according to Kelley.

The UNL program will be planned and directed by staff members from Teachers College and the College of Home Economics, Kelley said. Most job locations for NOVA students will center around poverty-related problems in the fields of education, mental health and extension services, he said.

Jean S. Theisen files for Board of Regents

The secretary of state's office reported Tuesday that Mrs. Jean S. Theisen has filed as a petition candidate for the first district Board of Regents seat.

Assuming her petitions are valid, Theisen would face Board of Regents Chairman Ed Schwartzkopf in the November general election.

Petitions for the regent seat must contain the signatures of 750 registered voters in Lancaster and Saunders county. According to the secretary of state's office, if the petitions are accepted, a paper accepting the nomination would have to be filed. Theisen already has done this, the office reported.

Theisen, 43, is a 1968 UNL graduate. She is mother-in-law of ASUN president Bruce Beecher.