

# UC Monthly Safety Spotlight, October 2012

## Careless Chris Heats It Up

By: Kitty

"Almost lunchtime!" Terri called out happily as she passed Careless Chris in the hallway. "You going to join us today?"

"Sorry," Chris replied with real regret, "I'm too busy to get away for that long. Tomorrow?"

"You bet, we'll see you then." Terri balanced on one leg, holding up her other foot to proudly display an amazingly colorful running shoe. "Check this out, I'm stylin' for the walkin'. How genius is it to join a fitness group that requires me to buy new shoes?"

"You're an inspiration!" Chris laughed, and continued to her desk with a lingering smile. Along with their regular lunch hour walks, most of the people in her department had also been having fun with healthy snack competitions and trying out new wellness classes. Nobody was losing weight but they were having fun and that seemed to help reduce stress levels.

There was plenty to stress about, too. Chris sighed as she settled back at her workstation. With budget cutbacks their unit had lost a couple positions through unreplaced retirements and even a layoff, but the workload hadn't really gone away. Some things took a little longer and some things didn't get done, but some things she just couldn't put in either of those categories and the stuff she had to finish today fell into that area. Glancing at the clock, she made a mental plan to complete her smaller task first, eat a quick lunch as an ergo break, then get the next bit of administrivia done before her 1:30 meeting. It was totally possible. *For Superman*, she conceded wryly, then pulled up the first file and started in.

When the group of walkers passed her on their way out a little bit later, she raised a hand and waved at them without taking her eyes off the screen. Their departing calls of sympathetic commiseration only spurred her into concentrating harder, even as the rest of the office occupants filed past on their way to their various lunch break destinations. A few minutes later, she was able to hit the last few keystrokes closing the database, then got up to head for the break room. *That actually went faster than I expected*, she mused. *Maybe I can get a short walk in after all.*

Her blue, insulated lunch bag was squashed in toward the back of the refrigerator and took a little digging to extricate. The leftover pizza she'd brought in wasn't all that much to look forward to, but at least it was better than having to eat the can of emergency tuna languishing in her bottom desk drawer. She pulled the plastic wrap off the slice, put it on the toaster oven rack, and set the dial for 400 degrees so the crust would get crispy instead of soggy. It wouldn't be done for at least five minutes, so after hesitating for a few seconds, she glanced at the clock to mark the time and headed back to her desk. With as much as she had to finish every bit of effort counted, especially if there was a chance of getting out in the sunlight before that meeting.

A few minutes later she had already completed the first stage of the task and was starting to believe she'd misjudged the amount of time it would take to get done, only in a good way for once. She wasn't sure if it was the peace and quiet of finally being alone for a while that made the job go smoother than expected, but she was grateful. Putting aside the first pile of paper, she was reaching for the next one when Terri came back in through the front door.

"Chris, you gotta come see this!" she said excitedly, waving what looked like a half-eaten cookie. "I ran all the way back to get you. There's a guy over by the plaza giving away free homemade chocolate chip cookies, just to university employees!" She took another bite from the cookie she was holding. "And they're great!"

"Really?" Chris was skeptical, but already pushing back her chair. She had time she hadn't expected, the job was going well, and it would be a shame to miss out on such a treat. "How come?"

"Some sort of thank-you for all our hard work, or whatever. But, chocolate!" They grinned at each other, paused on their way out to lock the door to the office, then headed toward the plaza at a trot. "This is my kind of wellness," Terri panted cheerfully.

The cookies were indeed tasty and Chris nibbled delicately at hers as the group strolled slowly back toward the office. They were all pleased with themselves and feeling good about life in general. It was a beautiful, temperate day and they paused more than once to admire campus attractions ranging from blooming shrubs to a hot sports car. It was nearly the end of the lunch hour by the time they rounded the last corner to their building.

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## Fire Prevention & Safety

"What's that noise?" Terri asked, as a loud rhythmic honking interrupted their conversation. "I think it's coming from up ahead. That's one weird sounding car alarm."

The group looked around, and Lenore suddenly pointed at their office entrance. "Guys, look! Smoke! It's a fire alarm!"

"Somebody dial 911!" Even as Chris said it, the sound of sirens revving up started in the distance. "Wait! Nobody go in! Are you nuts?" She had to grab the back of Terri's shirt to keep her from dashing toward the front door.

"But my good shoes are in there!" Terri wailed, and everyone else suddenly remembered their purses, coats, and other personal items. If the fire trucks hadn't rolled up and parked in front of them, Chris might not have been able to stop the rest of the group from trying to rescue their favorite belongings. Instead she was able to herd them over to the unit's designated evacuation gathering spot and while they milled around unhappily, the fire captain came over and asked them if everyone was out of the building.

"If the door's still locked, nobody else is back from lunch yet," Lenore volunteered, and Chris quickly offered her key. As firemen hooked up their hose to the hydrant at the edge of the parking lot and went in, the rest of the department personnel returned from lunch. Everyone was asking what had happened and speculating about the potential cause.

It didn't seem like very long before the smoke stopped coming from the doorway and then the firemen came out and started putting their gear back on the truck. The captain walked over to the group and asked if anyone had been using a toaster oven. That was when Chris remembered her slice of pizza.

"Oh my gosh, it was ME!" She clapped both hands over her mouth, staring in wide-eyed horror at the captain. When he invited her to view the damage, she followed him in a daze, hardly aware of the activity going on all around as he led her to the break room. The smell of smoke was intense, water was standing an inch deep on the floor, and the cabinets and ceiling above the counter where the toaster oven had sat were black with soot.

"It was just starting," he told her, "and we were able to get it knocked down before too much was involved. You were lucky this time. Unattended cooking causes a lot of fires and this little appliance could have taken down the whole structure."

"I swear I'll never leave anything in one again," Chris said weakly, barely able to keep tears at bay. She didn't want to go back outside and face her coworkers, but she knew she was going to have to explain to them that her forgotten leftovers had damaged or destroyed most of the office and its equipment, along with their hopes of getting anything done for days to come.