



SCOPE Tip of the Week Member Newsletter

October 29th, 2013

Hazing's Perfect Storm - The American College Fraternity

We are all familiar with the meteorological term known as the “perfect storm.” It is that rarest of phenomena in which multiple weather abnormalities converge in just the right place at just the right time to create a weather event of terrific magnitude. The term “perfect storm” has been generalized in modern culture as a catch-all phrase used to describe any situation in which circumstances align themselves to produce rare, and often dramatic, events.

The title of this article may lead you to believe that my intention is to suggest that hazing is uniquely a problem with fraternities. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. The [National Study of Student Hazing](#) demonstrated that hazing exists in a large number of organizations on the college campus. The study showed that hazing is more prevalent in varsity athletics than it is in fraternities, and demonstrated that nearly half of all students involved in clubs and organizations in college have experienced hazing in high school. [Aldo Cimino](#) has documented the evolutionary psychology of hazing, arguing that the hazing of newcomers in groups is ingrained in human behavior, and that virtually all groups engage in some form of newcomer hazing. Hazing is certainly not a fraternity, or even a college, problem.

The NSSH findings, while exonerating fraternities from the title of “most likely to haze,” belie an inescapable truth – the most egregious cases of hazing, particularly those resulting in serious injury or death, belong almost exclusively to fraternities. The obvious exception to this rule is the 2011 death of Florida A&M drum major Robert Champion, who died after being beaten in a hazing ritual known as “Crossing Bus C.” In scanning the [list of hazing deaths in the United States](#), one must go back another ten years to find the next non-Greek casualty on the list – the 2001 death of University of Minnesota-Duluth rugby player, Ken Christiansen. During the ten years between Christiansen and Champion, there were 31 fraternity-related hazing deaths in America. Sororities are certainly not exempt from scrutiny, as there were three hazing deaths in sororities during that same time period, but that number pales in comparison to fraternities. The American college fraternity stands head and

shoulders above any other organization on or off the college campus when it comes to hazing resulting in death. No other group even comes close.

When confronted with these brutal facts, one must conclude that the American college fraternity brings together a perfect storm for hazing. The rare combination of environmental factors present in the college fraternity converge to make it an environment that produces hazing of a terrific magnitude. But what are those variables? What about the college fraternity creates an environment so conducive to dangerous, deadly hazing? Examining these questions and truly understanding the unique factors that contribute to the fraternity hazing culture is the first step in moving towards an effective fraternity hazing prevention strategy. It is critically essential to understand what makes fraternity hazing so unique in order to properly address it. Over the next two weeks, this serialized article will offer an examination of two factors – the interplay of social status and conformity and the problem of absolute power – that are both unique to the fraternity culture and ultimately contribute to hazing’s perfect storm.

*Authored by Gentry McCreary, Ph.D., Affiliated Consultant, The NCHERM Group.
Contact him at gentry@nchem.org*

This publication is a member-only publication and may not be disseminated to non-members or posted publicly without authorization from SCOPE.

©SCOPE 2013. All rights reserved