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**READER'S DIGEST RANKS 135 AMERICAN COLLEGES FOR SAFETY
PREPAREDNESS NEARLY ONE YEAR AFTER VIRGINIA TECH**

Complete Rankings Available at www.RD.com

Many Urban Schools Deemed Safer than Colleges in Smaller Communities

Pleasantville, N.Y., February 7, 2008 – Almost a year after the Virginia Tech shooting, American colleges have made great strides in securing their campuses and protecting their students. However, as *Reader's Digest* discovered when it conducted a survey of 135 colleges and universities, much remains to be done. The March issue of *Reader's Digest*, which goes on sale on newsstands on February 19, features a special report on safety preparedness at colleges called "Safe at School?," which appears in conjunction with the survey results. The report examines the numerous safety threats faced by college students today and describes some of the best safety practices employed by certain schools. The full survey results can be seen at www.rd.com, along with the methodology used.

The survey takes into consideration the many variables between campuses, including size and location. For that reason, each of the 135 schools evaluated were given a grade of A, B or C, based on their readiness to handle on-campus threats to safety and security. Surprisingly, several urban schools, such as John Hopkins University and New York University, rated higher on campus safety than many schools in suburban areas or smaller cities, such as Bryn Mawr College or Wesleyan University, emphasizing that preparedness has more to do with appropriate allocation of resources and less to do with geographical setting.

According to crime data filed with the federal office of Postsecondary Education, our country's 6,000 colleges and universities report some 40,000 burglaries, 3,700 forcible sex offenses, 7,000 aggravated assaults and 48 murders a year – much of it

triggered by alcohol abuse. In addition to the threat of crime, campus housing fires nearly doubled since 1998; suicide is now the second-leading cause of death among students, after accidents; and alcohol contributes to an estimated 1,700 student deaths and nearly 600,000 injuries a year.

“Colleges are a reflection of our society,” said Peggy Northrop, Editor-in-Chief, *Reader’s Digest*. “You don’t escape crime or other hazards when you head off to school. We hope with this article to help parents and students understand the facts and make informed choices.”

“Safe at School?” shares critical insights for parents, including:

- Almost 80% of campus crime is student-against-student, and alcohol is a factor in 95% of violent crime on campus.
- The rate of depression among college students seeking mental-health services more than doubled between 1989 and 2001.
- According to safety experts, the first six weeks of college are the most dangerous period of a student’s campus life, when freshmen are most vulnerable to alcohol abuse, hazing and crimes like acquaintance rape.

The report also features questions that parents and students should ask when first visiting a college, including: Is the school monitored – in real time, 24/7 – by video cameras?; Does the school use electronic-access card keys and newer campus-alert systems?; and, Are there smoke and carbon monoxide detectors in campus buildings?

Beyond the frightening statistics, many colleges are using innovative and effective tools to make their campuses more secure. “Safe at School?” includes several examples of best safety practices like St. John’s use of text messaging to communicate with students when an armed man was spotted on campus, and the University of Kentucky’s fire drills that feature theatrical smoke to help students understand what a real fire emergency is like. Across the country, examples abound of colleges and universities facing safety challenges head on in order to ensure the well-being of the students with whom they have been entrusted.

Methodology:

Survey questions were prepared in consultation with Matthew E. Kahn, Ph.D., UCLA; Safety on Campus, Inc.; and the International Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators.

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