

■ Obituaries/2B

■ Classifieds/5B

More news on [wacotrib.com](http://wacotrib.com)

## Playing with fire

Recreational burnings used as an 'expression of excitement'

**By Jessica Chia**

Tribune-Herald staff writer

While serious drought has prompted burn bans and a halt to fireworks sales, it hasn't snuffed out celebratory furniture burns in student neighborhoods.

Dallas Mavericks fans celebrated the team's NBA championship recently by burning furniture in the middle of the street, nothing out of the ordinary for the Baylor University students who have witnessed or taken part in a recreational burning.

"It was just really an expression of excitement," a witness said.

### Illegal, but not arson

Waco Fire Marshal Jerry Hawk said such intentional fires aren't arson, which involves the burning of property such as buildings and vehicles, but it is criminal mischief and illegal burning.

Of the nine students interviewed for this story, all declined to be identified, fearing repercussion.

Hawk warned that recreational fires could have serious consequences.

"Anytime that particular

occur and the right mood strikes.

### Not significant problem

"They occur from time to time but it's not epidemic. It just doesn't occur that often to where it's a significant problem. If it's something burning, we put it out, shoo everybody off and maybe arrest a few drunks. That's it," said Swanton, who noted alcohol is involved in most cases.

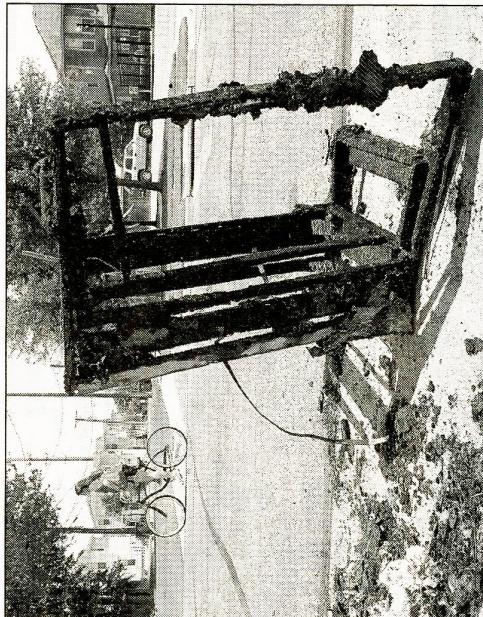
"I think people do it because it's something they're not supposed to do and it's illegal. It causes an uproar with all the fire trucks," said a student.

The rationale behind the burnings varies, but those who participate consider it an exciting and relatively harmless activity.

"Burning couches is just for fun," said another.

**jchia@wacotrib.com**

757-5734



Staff photo — Jerry Larson

A cyclist passes by a burned chair at 10th Street and Daughtry Avenue near the Baylor University campus.

If you burn it in the yard no one's going to take care of it, but if you burn it the street the fire department has to take care of it," explained another student.

Waco police spokesman Sgt. W. Patrick Swanton said the city's refuse department is responsible for removing the torched furniture. Couches and large chairs are almost always the targets.

Couches from porches. Students estimated the couch burnings occur about once every few months, depending on when inspiring events

are like the couches from people's front porches. They're the ones no one cares about," said a student who participated in several couch burns.

## FIRE

From Page 1B

See FIRE, Page 3B

**Editorial board**

**Clifton Robinson**, Chairman  
**Gordon Robinson**, President  
**Dennis Baggett**, Publisher and Editor  
**Bill Whitaker**, Senior editor

# Waco Tribune-Herald

# OPINION

**Dedicated to Truth, Honor and Integrity**

**WEDNESDAY**  
July 6, 2011

**4A**

## Editorials

Waco Tribune-Herald editorial board

## Campus stupidity

We're happy to learn that the merry outdoor burning of couches and furniture in and around the Baylor University neighborhood has not yet reached epidemic levels. Even so, these occasional celebratory acts symbolize much of what's wrong with higher education today: the failure by some students to realize college is a time to mature, a time to expand one's knowledge and even civic involvement — not to engage in silly, criminally destructive pursuits.

Tribune-Herald staff writer Jessica Chia's report on just such an act in the wake of victory by the Dallas Mavericks included comments from students describing such activities as "just really an expression of excitement." One referred to burning other people's furniture in the streets as "just for fun."

Yet, at a time of economic stress for most Americans, when higher education is increasingly under

assault both at public and private universities across Texas, at a time when Baylor President Ken Starr has vigorously sought to save Tuition Equalization Grants from state cuts and garner money from donors for scholarships, it's irresponsible to engage in such acts as destroying the property of others. Even if we weren't in a drought, such actions risk triggering fires that could cause loss of life and property.

The years one spends in college have always been viewed as a time of rediscovery, hard work and, yes, some jubilation before one greets the grim challenges of an increasingly competitive world.

Alas, too many students have seen too many juvenile films celebrating vandalism, anarchy and utter immaturity, all "just for fun." In following suit in real life, such students only fuel the nagging skepticism that others well along in years voice about those set to inherit the earth.