



THE EHS CONNECTION

ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH & SAFETY NEWSLETTER-MARCH 2016

Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire...

At the turn of the 20th century in the United States, most workers had precious few rights. Few belonged to unions. And many endured deplorable conditions, dangerous tasks, grueling hours and oppressive wages.

But events on the Saturday afternoon of March 25, 1911 at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in New York City, stirred America to move to protect workers. In less than 20 minutes, 146 people were dead - some burned to death; others leaped to their deaths from 100 feet up - victims of one of the worst factory fires in America's history.

After a successful strike two years earlier by the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union (ILGWU) Local 25 helped deliver better wages and working conditions to 15,000 garment workers in New York City, the owners of the Triangle factory, Isaac Harris and Max Blanck, continued to refuse to recognize unions, update any of their safety measures and continued to operate what was described as a sweatshop, producing the highly popular women's shirtwaist, a tailored blouse. Coincidentally, the strike was called when the owners of the Triangle factory fired 150 suspected union sympathizers. While Harris and Blanck grew rich tapping into the trendy clothing's popularity, workers languished in deplorable and unsafe conditions.

105 years ago on March 25th at 4:45 in the afternoon of the four-month anniversary of a fire in a Newark, N.J., which killed 25 people, fire broke out in a cutting area on the eighth floor of the Triangle Shirtwaist factory in Greenwich Village, in New York city. Within minutes, the top three floors of the Asch Building at 23-29 Washington Street were engulfed in flames. Many of the staff, mostly recently immigrated Jewish and Italian women, some as young as 14, were trapped in a building that claimed to be fireproof. Some began to fall and jump from the windows. Police and firefighters from nearby stations were impeded by the bodies on the sidewalk.



The harrowing accounts ring as unnerving and as unsettling today as they were 100 years ago - groups of young women leaping to their deaths, a man dropping women out the windows, falling bodies ripping through the fire departments' nets and gruesome accounts of bodies piling up on the sidewalk and blocking the fire engines, and inside, skeletal remains slouched over sewing machines and charred bodies piled up by locked and blocked doorways. A combination of callous management, overcrowding and hazardous work conditions, and ill-conceived architecture conspired to cut short so many lives.

The architect was given special permission to make only two staircases, instead of three. A flimsy iron fire escape that stopped at the second floor was passed off as a third staircase. Exit doors opened inward to the space, making it nearly impossible to open the doors amid the crush of panic-stricken workers. Managers often locked the exits to prevent workers from sneaking out for a break and to prevent theft. Those locked doors prevented workers from escaping the flames. Other exits were blocked with boxes of scrap fabric which had been accumulating for nearly six months.

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A steady stream of workers filed out onto the fire escape which before long, collapsed under the weight of the people and the heat of the fire sending several people to their deaths from a six-story fall. Elevator operators worked feverishly to bring groups of workers to safety, 10 at a time. Still, some workers flung themselves down the elevator shaft to escape the flames, their bodies crashing onto the car filled with terrified escapees. Estimates peg the number of workers on those top three floors at 500 or more.

The fire fighters from local Ladder Company 20 arrived minutes after the flames erupted. Because the hoses were too weak and the ladders too short to reach above the sixth floor, the men simply sprayed the building in the hopes the mist from the water would cool the victims trapped above.

At a local police station, a makeshift morgue was quickly overwhelmed. Bodies of the fall victims lay where they fell, some covered with tarps, others exposed to the elements. Within 25 minutes, burned and broken bodies alike lined Green Street awaiting a friend or family member to recognize and claim them. Some would never be identified. Others were found by a mark on their stockings or a ring.

The Bellevue morgue became overrun and a nearby pier was employed as a makeshift morgue. Family and friends filed by the bodies in an effort to find and claim a loved one.



AFTERMATH

While the firefighters got the blaze under control in about 30 minutes, the destruction and devastation burned into the American public's mind. Factory owners Harris and Blanck remained resistant to change and apparently impervious to the outcries of the public and the anguish of the survivors, the victims and their families. Harris and Blanck opened another factory a few days later and it was deemed to have no fire escape and inadequate exits.

Defense attorney Max Steuer successfully defended the men during their trial in New York City for manslaughter by casting enough doubt on the key factor in the trial - Did Harris and Blanck know the exits were locked? The trial lasted 23 days and had 150 witnesses. Three years later, after several civil trials, the men settled at a rate of \$75 per life. An insurance policy, however, paid Harris and Blanck about \$400 per life lost. The men pocketed about \$60,000 by the end of the ordeal. Over the next few years, the men were cited and fined numerous times for locking exit doors during business hours.

While Harris and Blanck remained unchanged, things began to change in the American workforce. One could believe that the Department of Labor's seeds sprouted that day. The fire ignited people's interest in workers' safety, in fair wages, in establishing dignity for America's working men and women.

The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, one of the nation's most deadly and horrific, led to some of the nation's strongest changes in worker safety in the manufacturing industry. From the ashes of tragedy rose the phoenix of reform.

New York City and New York State, over the next few years, adopted the country's strongest worker safety protection laws. Initially addressing fire safety, these laws eventually became model legislation for the rest of the country and state after stated enacted much more strict worker safety laws.



REMINDER: OFPC ANNUAL FIRE SAFETY INSPECTION STARTS MONDAY, MARCH 7TH...ARE YOU READY???

INSPECTOR ADAM D'AMICO WILL INSPECT EVERY BUILDING ON CAMPUS TO ASSURE THE LIFE SAFETY OF OUR STUDENTS, FACULTY, STAFF, AND VISITORS. PLEASE BE READY FOR HIS VISIT AND KEEP YOUR AREA FIRE-SAFE ALL YEAR!

PRE-INSPECTION WALK THROUGH TIPS

- *REMOVE ALL EXTENSION CORDS AND REPLACE THEM WITH POWER STRIPS WITH OVER CURRENT PROTECTION BREAKERS.*
- *EXTENSION CORDS NOT BEING USED SHALL BE DISCONNECTED FROM THE OUTLET AND PROPERLY COILED UP.*
- *NO POWER STRIPS CAN BE PLUGGED INTO ANOTHER POWER STRIP OR EXTENSION CORD. DEVICE USED MUST BE PLUGGED DIRECTLY INTO AN OUTLET.*
- *REPAIR/REPLACE FRAYED ELECTRIC CORDS AND HAVE ANY JUNCTION BOXES OR ELECTRICAL COVERS REPLACED SO THAT CONNECTIONS AND WIRES ARE NOT EXPOSED.*
- *HAVE ANY JUNCTION BOXES OR ELECTRICAL COVERS REPLACED SO THAT CONNECTIONS AND WIRES ARE NOT EXPOSED.*
- *LABELED FIRE DOORS CANNOT BE PROPPED OPEN. REMOVE ANY PROP OPEN DEVICES.*
- *PROPERLY SECURE ANY GAS CYLINDERS TO PREVENT THEM FROM FALLING OVER BY USING CHAIN AND/OR STRAPS TO A FIXED POINT.*
- *COMBUSTIBLE STORAGE CANNOT BE WITHIN 18 INCHES IN ROOMS THAT ARE PROTECTED BY SPRINKLERS AND 24 INCHES WITHOUT SPRINKLERS.*
- *CHECK FLAME RETARDANT REQUIREMENTS FOR CURTAINS/DRAPES IN ASSEMBLY SPACES OF 50 OR MORE PEOPLE AND LAB SPACES.*
- *ENSURE THAT ALL HALLWAYS AND STAIRWELLS ARE FREE OF OBSTRUCTIONS-ESPECIALLY COMBUSTIBLE MATERIAL STORAGE.*
- *ENSURE THAT ALL EXIT SIGNS ARE ILLUMINATED AND IN GOOD CONDITION.*
- *ALL CEILING TILES ARE IN PLACE AND NOT BROKEN.*
- *ENSURE THAT ALL FIRE AND LIFE SAFETY EQUIPMENT IS ACCESSIBLE AND NOT OBSTRUCTED.*
- *MAINTAIN UNOBSTRUCTED EXITS AND EGRESS.*

CONTACT TIM GANEY X3156 OR JORDAN DAVEY X3609 WITH ANY CONCERNS OR QUESTIONS

LOSE THE STRESS...

Apart from taking an emotional toll on you, stress also manifests itself in many physical ways. From headaches, back aches and stomach aches to trouble sleeping and becoming easily irritated, stress can harm your body and lead you to make bad lifestyle choices - overeating, drinking too much and not exercising - that can increase your blood pressure.

The American Heart Association offers tips on how to fight stress in a healthy way:

TALK WITH FAMILY AND FRIENDS.

Don't try to handle everything on your own. Turn to the people who care about you.

ENGAGE IN DAILY PHYSICAL ACTIVITY.

Physical activity can reduce mental and physical tension.

EMBRACE THE THINGS YOU ARE ABLE TO CHANGE.

Work toward a goal that you can accomplish, or do something you enjoy.

REMEMBER TO LAUGH.

Focusing on the stress and letting it consume you won't help matters. You need a release. Don't be afraid to laugh and enjoy life.

GIVE UP THE BAD HABITS.

Drinking alcohol or caffeine in excess or smoking cigarettes can raise blood pressure. And avoid eating to deal with stress.

SLOW DOWN.

Find ways to pace yourself and avoid rushing, which only adds to stress.

GET ENOUGH SLEEP.

Aim for six to eight hours of sleep each night.

GET ORGANIZED.

Give yourself more control over your life by organizing your tasks and demands and approaching them strategically.

PRACTICE GIVING BACK.

Helping others can reduce your stress levels and help you focus on the positive things in your life.

TRY NOT TO WORRY.

Sometimes the things that seem the most pressing, aren't as important as you think. Take a step back and focus on what matters.

SUSTAINABILITY

Electric-vehicle charging stations available! In the south parking lot of the Shineman Center, 6 electric cars can charge at a time thanks to newly installed charging stations. This is another great step towards reducing our carbon footprint on campus, and it can be a great convenience for electric car owners. The first four hours of charging are also free! After this free period there is a \$3 per hour charge.

ERGONOMIC ASSESSMENT: CHRISTINE BODY HAS BEEN DOING ERGONOMIC ASSESSMENTS SINCE 1996 AND IS AVAILABLE TO DO THEM HERE ON CAMPUS. SHE CAN BE REACHED AT 312-2770 AND WOULD BE HAPPY TO ASSIST YOU WITH ANY QUESTIONS OR ISSUES.

MARCH WORD SEARCH

For a chance to win a great prize (more like an OK prize, but-hey, it's a PRIZE!), complete the Word Search and send it via e-mail to lisa.drake@oswego.edu OR through Campus Mail: Lisa Drake, 110 Lee Hall. Make sure to put your name on it! The winner for February was Avis Miller. Look for Triangle Shirtwaist, Rights, Union Sympathizers, Factory Fire, Sweatshop, Strike, Hazardous, Fire Escape, Inadequate Exits, Civil Trials, Locked Exit Doors, Worker Safety Laws, Victims, Survivors, Legislation, Extension Cords, Power Strips, Fire Doors, Ceiling Tiles, Stress, Talk, Activity, Goal, Laugh, Sleep, Worry.

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PET SAFETY TIP

PRODUCTS SUCH AS PAINTS, MINERAL SPIRITS AND SOLVENTS CAN BE TOXIC TO YOUR PETS AND CAUSE SEVERE IRRITATION OR CHEMICAL BURNS. CAREFULLY READ ALL LABELS TO SEE IF THE PRODUCT IS SAFE TO USE AROUND YOUR FURRY FRIENDS. ALSO, BE CAUTIOUS OF PHYSICAL HAZARDS INCLUDING NAILS, STAPLES, INSULATION, BLADES AND POWER TOOLS. IT MAY BE WISE TO CONFINE YOUR DOG OR CAT TO A DESIGNATED PET-FRIENDLY ROOM DURING HOME IMPROVEMENT PROJECTS.