

# Triangle shirtwaist factory fire essay

[Business](#), [Company](#)



Arguably, America as a nation has been formed by the events and people who were leaders in the past. Fire in the triangle shirtwaist company is one of the disastrous events that had major negative consequences in American history. As a matter of fact the fire at the triangle factory became an important event which led to changes in the policies formed by American government on safety of fire (Broyles, 2004). Additionally, it became a catalyst for the numerous labor reforms in America. It was on 25 March 1911, a horrible catastrophe struck the city of New York, fire broke out in the Triangle Shirtwaist organization. The fire claimed the lives of 146 people who did not die in vain.

The inferno occurred in the Eight, Nine and the Tenth floor of Asch building in New York. The ten storey construction was owned Harris Isaac and Max Blanck, located at Greene Street in Washington place corner. They manufactured popular women blouse called the shirtwaist. It actually began before five o'clock on Saturday. At these time workers of triangle factory were preparing to head home after their shift. Many people who were in the tenth and eighth floor escaped as the fire spread. Individuals on the Ninth floor received the alarm so late; hence they could not escape the fire.

Just like any other producers of women's clothes, Triangle Company utilized the subcontract employment system. Under this contractual system, employees were to deal unswervingly with subcontractors. Workers were paid very low salary after working for very long hours under inhuman working conditions. The triangle company at that moment was the biggest manufacturers of shirtwaists in New York. The workers in the company on that terribly days were girls and women from the age of 12-23 years, most of

them were immigrants from Italy, Russian, Germany and Hungary. Due to their origin the workers spoke very little or none English at all (Broyles, 2004).

According to investigations the fire was caused by a lighted match. William Marshall said that the fire started when an individual threw a lighted match into either clippings or oil on the eighth floor of Greene Street. The company's policies were clearly stated that no one was allowed to smoke inside the factory premise, despite that Beers reports affirmed that fire investigators pulled out many cases of cigarettes near the spot where fire began (Nobleman, 2008). To support the investigations, employees admitted that smoking common behavior on the company's premises. The fire could have spread so fast because of the materials and clothing in the factory. The outcry of the public was overwhelming and immediate. Due to the triangle shirtwaist organization fire many groups were blamed for ignorance, they included ineffective fire regulation measures, corrupted insurance business as well as poor enforcement of building codes (Drehle, 2004). Above all the public pushed all the blame to the Triangle Company on the dangerous environment they expose to their employees due to dangerous and poor working conditions.

The victims who died were from the ninth floor. The main cause of the deaths was the faulty alarm system in the building. The floor had only one unlocked door meant for exit. Individuals on the ninth floor did not receive any notification due to the problem of the alarm system. They only received the warning from the flames and smoke that had spread all over. By the time they realized there was a problem, the only reachable stairwell was already

full of smoke and at the same time the elevators stopped working (Drehle, 2004). Probably, if the people on the ninth floor had received the alarm early enough as those in the tenth and the eighth floor did, lots of lives could be saved. Firefighters arrived in time to put off the fire but they could not save the 146 lives, people watched with grief from nearby buildings, streets and parks.

The exit from the building was made difficult because equipments in the factory blocked the only exit that was open. Furthermore, there was a problem in the way doors were opened. The Triangle factory doors were opened inwardly, hence such doors were very dangerous in case of an emergency. In the 1911 fire safety equipments were not actually dependable. Some of the people jumped through the window, rather than to be burned alive.

After the incident bodies of the victims were taken to Charities Pier for the identification of victims. Families, friends and survivors were all trying to at least identify those individual who died. It was so difficult identifying the bodies; identification was through shoes, dental filling as well as rings. After a century bodies of six victims had not been known until 2010-2011. Despite the unavailability of safety and rescue facilities many organization joined hands in relief efforts. Relief services were provided to assist families of the injured and dead as well as survivors. During this era, social services were not available therefore; the only way to help was through the relief (Nobleman, 2008).

After the fire incident there are several changes that have taken place, which are still ongoing in the world. The victims of Triangle factory fire did not die

in vain. Their death had much significance to the employees. The fire was actually the noxious industrial safety thing in New York. The public outcry on the incident led to establishment of labor and safety reforms. The investigation committee on the factory deaths proposed and worked for numerous reforms, looking for justice and legal rights of the employees. Lots of trials took place especially on the owners of the factory (Broyles, 2004). The owners of the factory were indicted by Charles Whitman for manslaughter on the justification that they knew the other door was locked. The trial case on Harris and Blanck took more three weeks. In the long run they were acquitted on lack of reasonable evidence.

The factory fire and the public horror led to federal, state and municipal reforms on the working conditions. The associations ensured that employees should prioritize on workers safety and working conditions. The disaster also saw the formation of stronger unions especially in garment industries, the unions took the initiative of bargaining for legislative reforms as well as the environmental working conditions. Individual who fought for reforms in American workforce received public attention; they include Francis Perkins, Clara Lemlich and Rose Schneiderman. Additionally, the legislation provided for installation of fire alarms, industries be enclosed with elevator shafts, fire drills and all wastes from factory must be dumped in fireproof receptacles (Nobleman, 2008).

Women in America aired their grievances, and at last their voices were heard, many organizations were formed, it included public safety committee, merchants association, New York board of trade and chamber of commerce. All these were established so as to discuss various complaints from the

employed women. Robert Wagner also established bureau to investigate on fire (Drehle, 2004). The bureau ensured that fire departments have their freedom to express opinions on the formation of fire safety rules. Some of the rules formed included , in every floor there must be two exists, fireproof stairways, fire escapes be made of steel or iron, automatic sprinklers and constant education of workers on the safety precautions to be followed in case of an emergency. The incident also led to setting of fair remuneration to the workers, limit of hours that the minor worked and only individuals who are over 16 are allowed to operate dangerous machines.

The Triangle factory is remains the most horrific fire to ever occur in New York. The damages and destructions were many but it also led to formation of laws as well as restrictions that are to ensure that same catastrophe does not occur again. After the terrible fire Triangle factory was closed for some years. It was later sold to New York University, which was converted to an historic site known as Brown Building.

## **References**

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