

# FIRE ENGINEERING

JANUARY, 1943

VOL. 96, NO. 1

## With the Editor

### The Boston Holocaust

From the welter of conflicting statements made at investigations following the fatal night club fire at Boston, certain facts contributing to the huge loss of life stand out. They are:

The place was seriously overcrowded.

Inflammable decorations were used.

Some exits were locked or otherwise unusable.

The blame for these conditions was divided. Overcrowding and blocked exits must be charged largely to the management. The responsibility for the use of inflammable decorations was divided. Infrequent or incomplete inspections on the part of the city gave the management, though morally guilty, the implied sanctions of the authorities for continuing the use of these materials. On the other hand, under state law, the authorities had considerable latitude with regard to permitting the use of inflammable decorations. Regulations issued by the State Fire Marshal on March 11, 1942, included the following: "Section 12. No inflammable decorations shall be used in stores, halls and places of public assembly except to such an extent as may be especially permitted by the head of the fire department and under such terms and conditions as he may prescribe.

The loss of life would have been far less had any one of the three conditions listed above been missing. Overcrowding contributed materially to the panic. Had no inflammable decorations been used, it is likely that the rate of progress of the fire

would have been such as to permit orderly evacuation of the structure. Had all exits been available, and unobstructed, a far greater number would have escaped, even if inflammable decorations had been used.

The holocaust was a good example of what can happen when a chain of unusual circumstance is brought into play.

While it was an awful price to pay for future safety in night clubs, it is evident that danger spots from coast to coast are already being cleaned up in a very thorough manner.

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**Gas Rations for Fire Engines:** What distance will your fire engines travel in the next three months and how many hours will they pump? These are questions many O. P. A. rationing boards are asking fire departments today. They say they need this information before they can give out gasoline coupons.

To us it seems incredible that these, or similar questions, should be asked. Apparently the smart young boys in Washington do not know that fires are still unpredictable.

These questions would be amusing were it not for the annoyance and inconvenience they impose upon already overloaded fire department heads.

*Fred. Sheppard*