

COCOANUT GROVE: 30 YEARS AFTER
Statement by Charles S. Morgan, President
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The Cocoanut Grove disaster set off a shock wave of apprehension throughout the United States. The public clamored for action to assure that night clubs, restaurants and other spots they frequented were safe, and worried public officials launched crash programs of building inspections and reviews of ~~xxxx~~ state and local codes providing life safety in buildings used by the public.

Thousands of instances of hazardous conditions were uncovered by inspections, and corrected. A substantial majority of codes were strengthened to provide safe and adequate exits, ~~and to eliminate~~ ~~combustible decorations~~ to limit the number of persons occupying a premises, ~~and~~ to eliminate combustible decorations, and in other ways brought up to the standards set by the National Fire Protection Association's Life Safety Code.

Every major fire tragedy in this country has produced a shocked reaction which has ultimately resulted in a gain in protecting people from the hazards of fire. The Cocoanut Grove disaster was no exception.

In the 30 years since Cocoanut Grove, unquestionably many more lives have been saved by the actions taken in the months following the tragedy than were lost in the fire.

Progress has continued. The quality of building inspections has improved. Technological advances in building methods and materials, and in safer decorative materials, continue to help lessen hazards. Standards ~~of~~ to provide life safety from fire in buildings have also been upgraded.

Could there be another Cocoanut Grove today?
unfortunately,

The answer must be "yes,"/although it is considerably less likely than in 1942.

There are still areas in this country where life safety codes are antiquated and inadequate. There are cities where building inspections are less than thorough and code enforcement is lagging, frequently because the inspection and enforcement agencies lack the funds and public support to do an effective job.

And, unhappily, there are still some operators of night clubs, restaurants and similar places who have forgotten or choose to ignore the lessons of Cocoanut Grove. ~~In these places~~ ^{They make} exits ~~are~~ as inconspicuous as possible, block them by using them for storage purposes, ~~and~~ ~~crowd tables~~ ignore capacity limits, and crowd tables together to a point where quick evacuation would be difficult and panic might ensue.

In the final analysis, you the public is responsible for these conditions. Unless you demand strong, modern codes for life safety in public buildings, and strict, impartial enforcement of them -- plus adequate funds for the enforcement agencies -- conditions will not improve.

The demands of a public shocked by Cocoanut Grove were largely responsible for the tremendous advances in life ^{safety} ~~protection~~ 30 years ago, which are still working to protect us. But the shock effect has largely disappeared, and I sometimes wonder if it will take another Cocoanut Grove to ^{remove} ~~correct~~ the unsafe, hazardous conditions that have reappeared in many places. I fervently hope we can correct without another calamity.

Your Personal Safety in Public Buildings

Here is guidance from the National Fire Protection Association on basic precautions to take when you are in restaurants, night clubs, theatres, sports arenas, hotels and other public places.

- Always check emergency exit locations nearest to you. Pick at least one alternate to the route you used coming into the place. In an emergency, most people will try to ~~leave by~~ go out the way they came in, causing a pile-up at the main exit while other exits are little used.
- In high rise buildings, do not use elevators in a fire emergency. They may be inaccessible or not operating. Use fire exit stairways.
- If any place is overcrowded to a point where movement is difficult, if in restaurants or night clubs tables are packed so closely it would be difficult to get to an exit, if exits are not clearly marked, the sensible move is to leave the place promptly.