

## Lest We Forget

November is a difficult month for the fire protection community. Is it better to remember — or to forget — that 40 years ago this month 492 people perished at Boston's Cocoanut Grove? Is it better to forget — or to remember — that two years ago this month, 85 people died in Las Vegas' MGM Grand Hotel?

It is easy to be smug and to say that the conditions that created those tragedies no longer exist. Since Cocoanut Grove, places of public assembly have more exits and the exits are more clearly marked. Since MGM Grand, hotels and motels are more aware of the need to protect their guests from fire. After both disasters, the public supported the ideal of rigorous fire codes and vigorous code enforcement. Oh, yes, things are better now!

Yet there is a nagging worry that the fire protection world can't quite seem to shake. The fire at the Beverly Hills Supper Club in Kentucky had some striking similarities to the fire at the Cocoanut Grove. Both fires occurred at popular clubs, where guests applauded famous entertainers and enjoyed the excitement of an evening out on the town. Both clubs had been renovated over their years of operation to become large establishments with many rooms and confusing floor plans. Code enforcement in both clubs was lenient enough that they were overcrowded and contained combustible interior finish or decorations, but did not provide adequate exits. As a result, fire became a tragedy that many could not escape.

In much the same way, fires at the Las Vegas Hilton, the Harrison, New York Stouffers Inn, the Westchase Hilton in Houston, and the Kearney, Nebraska Holiday Inn were somewhat like the fire at the MGM Grand Hotel: a severe fire in a modern facility that appeared — at least to the casual observer — to offer safety and comfort to the traveling public.

When we read of these recent fires, we experience an uneasy sense of *deja vu*, of having seen this all before. Should we remember — or should we forget?

We cannot forget, because today's fires have an eerie way of reminding us of yesterday's. Perhaps we can learn, however, by remembering. In that spirit, this issue of *FIRE JOURNAL* includes articles on the Cocoanut Grove fire, beginning on page 60, and on the lessons of recent hotel fires, beginning on page 72.

If we refuse to remember, who will?



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