

U.S. Fire Administration / National Fire Academy

*Coffee Break Training***Topic: The Role of Historic Fires**

Learning objective: The student shall be able to identify how significant, historic fires affect building and fire code development.

Why should the building in the picture be important to code officials? It is a modern photograph of Atlanta's Winecoff Hotel where, on December 7, 1946, 119 persons died in America's worst-ever hotel fire. When it was constructed, the building was advertised as being "fire proof" because it had a brick exterior; but it had no sprinklers, no fire doors, and no fire escapes. It had a single central interior spiral stairway that extended from the ground floor to the 15th floor.

As a result of the fire, many communities adopted stricter safety regulations to protect hotel guests and others. One specific requirement resulting from the Winecoff was the need to provide enclosed stairs for egress.

It is often said we learn from our mistakes, and here are just a few:

Fire	Date	Lives Lost	Code Changes
Iroquois Theater, Chicago, IL	12.30.1903	602	Outward door swing in places of assembly.
Cocoanut Grove, Boston, MA	11.28.1942	492	Egress distribution and regulation of combustible interior finishes.
Marting Arms, Richmond, IN	04.05.1968	41	Limits on gunpowder storage in retail sales occupancies.
Barnum and Bailey Circus, Hartford, CT	07.06.1944	168	Flame retardant treatments for tents.
Great Adventure Amusement Park, Jackson Township, NJ	5.11.1984	8	Fire and life safety improvements for "amusement buildings."
One Meridian Plaza, Philadelphia, PA	02.23.1991	3	Improvements in fire standpipe system design.
Station Nightclub, West Warwick, RI	02.19.2003	100	Sprinklers in places of assembly.

Hazardous conditions exist in almost every community, and we should learn from past events how to prevent other tragedies.

Will your jurisdiction be the next one where a "code changing" fire occurs?

