

The Anniversary of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire



March 25 is the anniversary of the infamous Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire. In 1911, a fire broke out at the factory, which employed more than 500 workers—mostly young women and recent Italian and Jewish immigrants. They fled to the fire escape. But it collapsed, dropping them to their deaths.

Other workers were forced to jump out of windows because exits were locked. Still others fell down the elevator shaft.

In the end, 146 workers had died. (For additional information on this tragedy, see the Remember the Triangle Fire Coalition.)

The Triangle fire resulted in the development of modern fire codes and safety laws, and led to the creation of the International Ladies' Garment Workers Union.

But sadly, things haven't changed all that much since this tragic fire, especially in factories in developing countries.

In fact, descriptions of the circumstances surrounding fires in clothing factories in Bangladesh are eerily similar to the Triangle fire.

For example, at least 110 garment factory workers died and about 200 others were injured in a fire on Nov. 24, 2012 near Dhaka, Bangladesh. The building lacked fire exits and some of the victims died after jumping from the burning structure.

To ensure that your workers don't suffer similar fates in the event of a fire:

- Have a fire safety plan that complies with the OHS laws
- Ensure the workplace has appropriate fire suppression and protection equipment, such as fire and smoke alarms, fire extinguishers and sprinkler systems—and that they're working properly and easily accessible
- Make sure that your emergency exits and fire doors aren't blocked
- Have procedures to address the needs of any workers who are disabled and may need special assistance in an emergency.