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## **1943 Cocoanut Grove Nightclub Fire**

# **Forensic Files**

**In 1943 the Cocoanut Grove Nightclub Fire killed 492 people in Boston, MA**



**Decorations inside the Nightclub.**

Over 1,000 patrons filled the 460-capacity nightclub on the night of the Boston College - Holy Cross football game. A busboy was instructed to fix a light bulb at one of the tables. He lit a match and adjusted the gas bulb. Soon after the ceiling and decorative paper palm trees erupted in flames. Many people attempted to exit the nightclub from the main entrance - a revolving door. However, the door quickly became jammed with people. Other exits had been previously sealed shut and others opened inward. Thus, in the crush of people, the doors were unable to be opened. Several employees survived by squeezing through barred windows in the kitchen and hiding in the walk-in refrigerator.

The fire department estimated that 300 lives would have been saved if the exit doors opened outwardly. Many of the burn victims were treated at Mass General Hospital and resulted in advances in the treatment of burns.

Later the forensic evidence was re-evaluated and it was determined that a gas leak from the refrigerator ignited the deadly blaze and the paper decorations just fueled the fire.

## **Fire Safety Code Changed Dramatically Around the U.S.**

As a result of the tragedy a 20-page report was released on the cause of the fire and how the death toll could have been avoided. Many cities in the U.S. immediately adopted the suggestions to prevent

another tragedy. Some changes included:

- 1) Exit doors were to open outward and could not be blocked.
- 2) Restaurants and clubs were now classified as "public meeting areas".
- 3) Paper decorations were deemed fire hazards.
- 4) Limits were placed on the number of movable chairs in an establishment.



**The aftermath of the fire at Boston's Cocoanut Grove nightclub that killed 492**