Forensic Files

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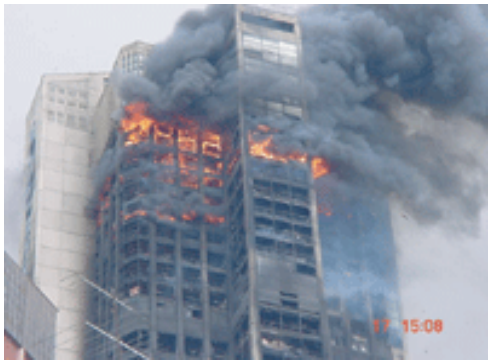
PRESSLER Engineering, LLC

SPRINKLER SYSTEM FAILURE

IT CAN HAPPEN ANYWHERE, ANYTIME



The fire reaches the 47th floor of the Parque Central in Caracas, Venezuela

One of the last attempts by the government helicopters to cool down the fire using water-filled buckets

This image was taken by retreating fire personnel as they left the partially collapsed 35th floor

Sometime before midnight on October 15, 2004, a fire began on the 34th floor of the East Tower of the Parque Central, a 56-story government office building in Caracas, Venezuela, and South America's tallest high-rise. Fortunately, the building was unoccupied at the time, except for a handful of security personnel who evacuated safely.

Despite the fact that a sprinkler system had been installed in the Parque Central, the fire did more than $250 million in damage and burned the structure's contents from the 34th floor to the 50th. Why? Because, as previous inspections revealed, the sprinkler system had not been properly tested or maintained, thus it wasn't in a working condition. The building designers said local fire alarm panels weren't connected to a building-wide panel and the standpipe system was inoperable at the time of the fire.

Past history and performance shows that this fire could probably have been controlled quickly by a standard wet-pipe sprinkler system and that the fire department's chances of controlling the fire at, or a few floors above, the floor of fire origin would have increased if the standpipe system had been working. This fire highlights the importance of periodic inspection, testing, and maintenance of fire protection systems, as well as the importance of strictly following manufacturers' installation instructions.

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