

0354 4 FIRES, 63 YEARS AND 952 DEATHS – WHAT HAVE WE LEARNED?

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Nightclubs are a place for fun and merriment for patrons, but in some cases they become death traps for those who are unfortunate enough to be caught in a fire. In this presentation, we will look at four fires that occurred in the United States that claimed 952 lives and what common themes were presented that connect these fires that span 63 years. A search of the Duquesne University library with Google Scholar search of nightclub fire produced multiple results from which a convenience sample was extracted according to relevance as determined by the authors. Four incidents that accounted for the worst loss of life in nightclub fires in the United States were selected: The Rhythm Club in Natchez, Mississippi in 1940, The Coconut Grove in Boston, Massachusetts in 1942, The Beverly Hills Supper Club in Southgate, Kentucky in 1977 and The Station in East Warwick, Rhode Island in 2003. In each of these cases the following difficulties were noted: action or inaction by the appropriate governmental agencies during construction, and subsequent inspections; actions by the owners including faulty construction; blocked doors resulting in impeded egress from the facilities and flammability of interior furnishings including decorations, pyrotechnic

displays and other materials all contributed to the loss of life. We will investigate the source of these tragedies and changes that were made to help to prevent this type of conflagration in the future.