

## Worker Safety - The Triangle Fire Legacy: It Could Happen Today! (ANSWER KEY)

**Event:** *(Company, Location & Date)*

**Summary of Situation:**

**Describe how you would feel if you were one of the workers.**

Similarities	Differences
<p><b>Case 1: Wal-Mart Lock-Ins. 2003</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Employees are locked in during working hours</i></li> <li>• <i>Employees accuse management of locking the doors to prevent theft and increase efficiency by preventing extra breaks from work.</i></li> <li>• <i>Workers were not unionized and fear losing their jobs if they take action</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Case 2: Imperial Foods Fire. 1991</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Many victims were poor women with limited employment options.</i></li> <li>• <i>Employees were locked in during working hours</i></li> <li>• <i>Both factories were filled with flammable materials.</i></li> <li>• <i>There were no sprinklers, no fire alarm and no fire safety plan.</i></li> <li>• <i>Worker safety protections that existed were not enforced.</i></li> <li>• <i>Prior to both fires there had been warning signals or problems</i></li> <li>• <i>The number of victims generated immediate widespread attention</i></li> <li>• <i>The state revamped their health and safety inspection programs – making them models for the rest in the country.</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Case 3: Kader Industrial Fire. 1993</b> <i>As of 2003, the Triangle Fire is considered the worst factory fire in the U.S. (146 deaths) while the Kader Fire is the worst factory fire in the world (187 deaths). In addition:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Most were young women from poor families</i></li> <li>• <i>Many leaped to death to avoid being burnt to death</i></li> <li>• <i>Besides unsafe working conditions, both factories employed child labor and paid low wages – elements characteristic of sweatshops</i></li> <li>• <i>Unions at the time of the fire were in their early organizational stages and weak</i></li> <li>• <i>Both factories were new but overcrowded with workers and flammable materials</i></li> <li>• <i>There were no fire extinguishers, no alarms, and no sprinkler systems in the buildings</i></li> <li>• <i>Exits were locked or otherwise impassable</i></li> <li>• <i>The few building and safety codes that existed at the time of the fires were not enforced</i></li> <li>• <i>Prior to both fires there had been warning signals of problems</i></li> <li>• <i>A factory worker careless with a cigarette was accused of starting the fire</i></li> <li>• <i>Company owners and executives were acquitted of all court charges related to the fire</i></li> <li>• <i>The injured and families of the deceased received minimal compensation for their losses</i></li> <li>• <i>Recommendations after the fire for factory improvements were similar: a working alarm system, sufficient emergency exits, emergency exit plans</i></li> </ul>	<p><b>Case 1: Wal-Mart Lock-Ins. 2003</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The fire exits at Wal-Mart are not locked – one of several protections that grew out of the Triangle Fire.</i></li> <li>• <i>Triangle Fire Workers were recent immigrants – while not noted in this story, some of the workers may be recent and illegal immigrants on cleaning crews.</i></li> <li>• <i>Wal-Mart management offers an additional reason for the lock-ins – protecting workers from criminals</i></li> <li>• <i>There has been no major tragedy at Wal-Mart yet.</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Case 2: Imperial Foods Fire. 1991</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The 25 deaths in the Hamlet Fire was about one-sixth of the deaths in the Triangle Fire</i></li> <li>• <i>Workers in the Triangle Fire were white while Hamlet employees were black.</i></li> <li>• <i>In addition to the locked doors, the Hamlet windows were boarded.</i></li> <li>• <i>Though not enforced, many workplace safety rules were in place at the time of the Hamlet Fire.</i></li> <li>• <i>The Hamlet plant was visited daily by an inspector who knew the plant doors were regularly locked in violation of safety codes - the violation that was never reported.</i></li> <li>• <i>Racism may have been another factor – it is blamed for a local fire chief's refusal to accept assistance from a neighboring fire company.</i></li> <li>• <i>The Triangle Factory owners were acquitted in court. After the Hamlet fire there was no trial. The Owner Roe pleaded guilty to 25 counts of manslaughter. The company was fined of \$800,000 dollars, and the owner spent four years in prison.</i></li> </ul> <p><b>Case 3: Kader Industrial Fire. 1993</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>The Triangle Factory operated in a fire-proof building whereas the Kader Factory buildings were shoddy and failed to meet even the minimal Thai construction requirements</i></li> <li>• <i>The Triangle Factory was owned by domestic interests while the Kader Factory was foreign-owned</i></li> <li>• <i>The Triangle Fire led to new laws and the organization of workers in the U.S. to provide new safety and health protections – this has not been the case with the fire in Thailand</i></li> <li>• <i>Far from improving, the conditions facing workers in Thailand and other Asian countries significantly worsened. Asia's economy collapsed in the 1997-98 financial crisis and Asian nations faced with high unemployment and poverty. The former Asian "tigers" must vie with each other to demonstrate to global corporations that theirs is the cheapest and best workforce.</i></li> </ul>

**Not all efforts to reduce death and injury on the job require collective action. How might workers individually help prevent workplace deaths and injuries?**

- *Use common sense – acting with caution to prevent hazards (e.g., no smoking, maintain machines).*
- *Follow safety rules set by the employer and government*
- *Know location of alarms, fire extinguishers, emergency exits, etc.*

- Have a plan of action in case there is a fire. (e.g. know how to use fire extinguishers, how you would escape)
- Warn management of unsafe conditions.
- Report violations to government enforcement agencies.

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Solutions		Pros	Cons
<b>G O V E R N M E N T</b>	<b>New protections</b> (e.g., building codes, workplace safety rules)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forces employers to protect workers with threat of fine or other punishment</li> <li>• All workers in an industry or geographic region are protected the same</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Challenges of getting public and political support</li> <li>• No guarantee new rule will be enforced</li> <li>• Costs of physical improvements and enforcement must be paid by business, consumers and/or taxpayers</li> <li>• Protections could make industry/nation less competitive in attracting/keeping new jobs</li> </ul>
	<b>Enforce existing protections</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Energy and time required to report can be minimal</li> <li>• If government is willing and able to enforce, resolution may be relatively quick.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need a law to enforce</li> <li>• Problems must be reported by someone</li> <li>• Workers may fear loss of job if they report a problem</li> <li>• Government must be willing and able to follow-through with enforcement</li> <li>• Court action to force enforcement can take time and is expensive.</li> <li>• Costs of enforcement passed to taxpayers who do not necessarily benefit from law</li> </ul>
	<b>Other</b> (e.g., employer and employee education)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Places responsibility for safety on employees and well as employers</li> <li>• An educated workforce is better prepared to deal with unanticipated situations</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Depends on voluntary cooperation of employers and employees</li> <li>• Challenges of reaching all employers and employees (e.g., geography, language barriers)</li> </ul>
<b>ORGA N I Z E D  L A B O R</b>	<b>Negotiate</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Probably the fastest way to remedy situation (e.g. meeting with management, labor contract negotiations)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Protects only workers in one unionized company or industry</li> <li>• Requires cooperation of management</li> <li>• Workers must be organized or willing to organize</li> <li>• Requires agreement among and support of workers</li> <li>• Costs of changes are paid by business or passed on to consumers</li> <li>• Workers may have to give up another goal such as higher wages to achieve safety protections.</li> <li>• Protections may make business or industry less competitive in marketplace reducing wages and job security</li> </ul>
	<b>Strike</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can be a quick way to remedy situation.</li> <li>• Public embarrassment may convince company to change.</li> </ul>	<p>Same negatives as negotiations, also:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workers lose pay during strike.</li> <li>• Consumers may not be able to purchase product</li> <li>• Business loses money with possible worker lay-offs and wage cuts.</li> <li>• Business may not be able to recover market share after strike (e.g., consumers find a substitute product)</li> </ul>
	<b>Boycott</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Public embarrassment may convince company to change.</li> </ul>	<p>Same negatives as negotiations, also:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires cooperation of media and consumers to be effective.</li> <li>• Business loses money with possible worker lay-offs and wage cuts.</li> <li>• Business may not be able to recover market share after boycott (e.g., consumers find a substitute product)</li> </ul>

	<b>Other</b> (e.g. lobby for government action, worker education)	<i>Responses will vary but may include some previously listed.</i>	<i>Responses will vary but may include some previously listed.</i>
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