



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE FIRE MARSHALS

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National Association of State Fire Marshals Issues Call to Action Following the January 27 Nightclub Fire in Santa Maria, Brazil

The National Association of State Fire Marshals (NASFM) extends its deep sympathy to the families of the more than 230 individuals who perished in the tragic nightclub fire in Santa Maria, Brazil, in the early morning hours of Sunday, January 27. It is, unfortunately, a sad reminder that the world has not learned the lessons of similar fires in modern nightclubs over the past decade.

Nearly 10 years ago, in February 2003, our nation lost 100 souls in The Station nightclub in Rhode Island, and similar tragedies with large losses subsequently occurred in Argentina (2004), Thailand (2008), and Russia (2009). The deadly combination of factors we see again and again in these fires includes occupancy limits that were exceeded, indoor pyrotechnics, flammable finish materials and building contents, and blocked exits.

“NASFM calls on building owners and managers to work with the fire service and code enforcement officials to put an end to these worldwide losses,” says NASFM President J. William Degnan, New Hampshire State Fire Marshal.

Degnan adds, “The recommendations issued by the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) following an extensive investigation of The Station fire are still current and need to be aggressively enforced if nightclubs are to be trusted as a fire-safe place for our young people to gather.” These recommendations can be seen at http://www.nist.gov/public_affairs/factsheet/ri_recomm_factsheet.cfm.

Among those recommendations were adoption and enforcement of the most current building and fire codes covering nightclubs. “Fire and buildings codes were shaped by tragedies such as these,” said Degnan. “We don’t necessarily need more codes at this point, but we do need to aggressively enforce the codes and standards that exist currently.” Model codes issued by the International Code Council (www.iccsafe.org) and the National Fire Protection Association (www.nfpa.org) are available for use worldwide.

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NASFM emphasizes several factors that state and local jurisdictions must consider to ensure safety in the nightclubs and other public assembly occupancies in their communities:

- Sprinklers should be installed in compliance with the most recent model codes for all new nightclubs and for existing nightclubs with an occupancy limit greater than 100 people.
- All fire protection systems – including fire sprinklers, fire alarms and emergency lighting - should be in good working order at all times.
- Interior finishes and contents should be constructed of flame-resistant materials. Non-fire-retarded foam plastic finish materials ignite easily and propagate flames rapidly, and should not be permitted in new or existing nightclubs.
- No indoor fireworks should be permitted. If it is not possible to have a total ban, pyrotechnics should be used only after careful evaluation of the facility, the pyrotechnics, and the qualifications of the operator, in accordance with applicable standards.
- All exits should be continually evaluated to assure they are not obstructed, are clearly marked, and always available for emergency egress.
- Occupant loads should be carefully monitored to prevent overcrowding.
- Trained crowd managers should be on site at a rate of one crowd manager for each 250 attendees to prevent the disaster if possible, and to direct evacuations if needed. A Crowd Manager Training Program endorsed by and available through NASFM at www.firemarshals.org is aimed at making public gatherings safer by teaching event staff how to comply with model codes that address safety in public assembly occupancies.

Additionally, customers who patronize nightclubs should always be aware of their surroundings, locate exits and make sure those exits are not blocked. If a building does not feel safe, do not stay. In an emergency, or at the sound of an alarm, leave immediately and do not return to the building for any reason.

“All of us -- from the owners and managers, to those who adopt and enforce the codes, to those who patronize nightclubs -- have a responsibility to aggressively pursue safety measures to avoid another nightclub tragedy,” Degnan said. “Fire is Everyone’s Fight™, and with the right preparation and diligence, we can win this fight.”

About NASFM, “One Strong Voice for Fire Prevention”

The principal membership of the National Association of State Fire Marshals (NASFM) comprises the senior fire officials in the United States and their top deputies. The primary mission of NASFM is to protect human life, property and the environment from fire and related hazards. A secondary mission of NASFM is to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of State Fire Marshals’ operations. Learn more about NASFM and its issues at www.firemarshals.org.

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