



NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF STATE FIRE MARSHALS

January 13, 2014

Dear State Fire Marshal and NASFM Member:

Given the recent nightclub fire in Seattle, I thought it would be a good opportunity to revisit the issue of safety in public assemblies and how we can achieve good results in our communities. It appears that there were a number of positive issues that culminated in making an arson fire set in an occupied nightclub on New Year's Eve a non-event.

The nightclub was fairly crowded, but probably within their occupant load; an arsonist poured gasoline on the exit stairs and set it on fire. News accounts state that staff and a patron used portable fire extinguishers on the fire with some success, and because the club was sprinkled, that system also activated, keeping the fire in check. The entire crowd was able to exit the club unharmed, and the fire damage was minimized by the combined use of fire extinguishers with the sprinkler system – we should remember Wayne Powell's mantra: "Anything that gets wet will eventually dry out; something that burns will never unburn". Adequate exits, trained staff, portable extinguishers and sprinklers all played important roles in this incident.

If someone set a fire in one of the nightclubs in your state, would the outcome be the same? I suspect the answer is "maybe", so I'd like to remind everyone of the importance of trained crowd managers. As most of you know, the training endorsed by NASFM includes a significant amount of basic fire prevention instruction, including egress maintenance, assuring fire protection systems are functional, use of portable extinguishers, and following the facility's emergency action plan, among others. Having trained crowd managers in public assemblies expands our ability to raise the level of safety by placing people with a basic level of fire prevention and overall safety in each facility.

One question arises with some frequency: "Where are trained crowd managers required?" Of course, the answer to the question is in the code adopted by your state, but consider the following:

- *In movie theaters, trained crowd managers should inspect their area of responsibility before each shift, making sure that access is adequately controlled without jeopardizing egress; this will enhance security and safety.*
- *In restaurants, trained crowd managers should check the kitchen hood system to be sure it will function should a fire occur in the cooking area*

- *In stadiums and arenas, crowd managers knowledgeable about the rules relating to contraband will help prevent a crowd from getting out of control*
- *In hotel ballrooms, keeping the exits clear of catering carts, etc. will allow the timely egress from the ballroom during an emergency*
- *For outdoor events, the trained crowd manager will know to activate the emergency plan early in case of approaching severe weather, and will know where to direct the crowd.*

These are only a few examples where trained crowd managers will make a significant difference. We can't have inspectors in every assembly occupancy or event, and trained crowd managers can partially fill that gap. I encourage you to utilize all of your regulations, including the requirements for trained crowd managers, to make your state as safe as possible. Note that access to the crowd manager training program endorsed by our association is available through our website at www.firemarshals.org.

Feel free to disseminate this letter to the fire service in your state so we can continue to raise awareness about crowd safety.

Best Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "J. William Degnan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "J".

J. William Degnan, President
National Association of State Fire Marshals