

226 file lawsuit over Rhode Island nightclub fire

Victims' relatives, survivors jointly cite 46 defendants

Associated Press
Providence, R.I. — More than 200 people affected by last year's Rhode Island nightclub fire joined in filing a lawsuit Thursday, citing the state, club owners, the White and a fire inspector.

The 70-count lawsuit was filed in Providence Superior Court by 187 plaintiffs and 46 defendants, including the state, club owners, the White and a fire inspector.

was the largest wave of plaintiffs to bring suit over the deadly blaze. The Feb. 20, 2003, fire at The Station nightclub in West Warwick was sparked by onstage fireworks during a performance of Great White. It killed 100 people and injured more than 200. Thousands of lawsuits involving relatives of those who died and 146 of the 200 who were injured.

The plaintiffs are suing for monetary damages, but no dollar amount was mentioned in the lawsuit.

Lawyer Mark Mandell, one of eight lawyers who filed the lawsuit, called it "the product of a year's work preserving and analyzing evidence."

In total, the 130-page lawsuit names 46 defendants, including State Fire Marshal Irving Owens, and it allows for more defendants to be added.

It accuses club owners Jeffrey and Michael Derderian of negligently failing to obtain a license for pyrotechnics and failing to install safe soundproofing material. It also claims fire inspector Denis Larsoque is liable for failing to note the presence of the foam used as soundproofing during a series

of routine fire inspections conducted since the Derderians bought the club in March 2000. The lawsuit also alleges that band leader Jack Russell and the band's tour manager, Dan Biachele, were negligent for igniting the pyrotechnics.

In the lawsuit, Anheuser-Busch is alleged to have contributed to overcrowding in the club by promoting the Great White beer where its Budweiser beer was to be sold. Clear Channel Broadcasting was also named in the lawsuit, for the promotion of the concert by one of its radio stations, WHJY.

Disco fire in Buenos Aires kills at least 169: official



At least 169 people have been killed and 375 injured in a fire at a Buenos Aires discotheque packed with about 2,000 teenagers celebrating the end of the school year, a city official said.

"This is a disaster. This is a disaster," a stunned Interior Minister Anibal Fernandez told reporters outside the blazing discotheque. He warned that the final death toll could be higher still.

Fernandez blamed the tragedy on overcrowding and on blocked emergency exits at the club. The young people "were caught inside a mortal trap," he said.

He also confirmed that most of the concert-goers were between 15 and 18 years old, with some children under 10 years of age among them.

Exits Locked in Argentina Nightclub Fire

By KEVIN GRAY, Associated Press Writer

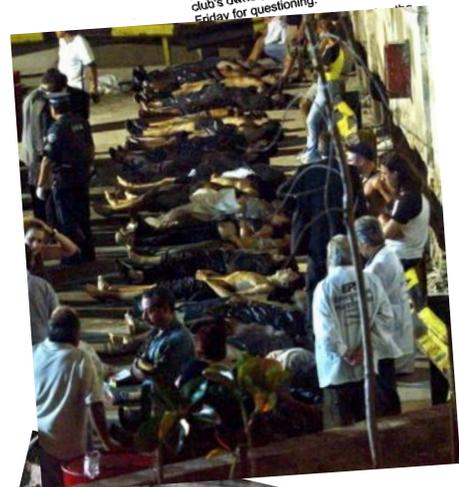
BUENOS AIRES, Argentina — Emergency exits at a nightclub packed with teenagers were padlocked or wired shut when a flare ignited the foam ceiling, sparking a blaze that killed 175 people and injured more than 700 in one of Argentina's worst disasters, survivors and officials said Friday.



Some 4,000 fans at a Thursday night concert by the band Los Callejeros fought to reach the exits as burning debris fell on them. But they found at least four escape routes locked in an apparent effort to prevent people from entering the club without paying, Buenos Aires Mayor Anibal Ibarra said.

"Had they been open, we surely would have avoided a lot of deaths," Ibarra said, calling the locked doors at the Republica de la Cromagnon disco an "irresponsible act." The club's name means Cromagnon Republic.

The concert crowd also was nearly three times the venue's capacity of 1,500 people, Argentine media reported. The club's owner, Omar Chaban, was detained Friday for questioning.



MAKE HEADLINERS... NOT HEADLINES

10 tips on how to avoid a tragic headline

The following are time proven life-safety issues every nightclub, tavern, or bar owner and operator need to know about and monitor to avoid a substantial fine or worse...a place in history for the next tragedy.

1. Check exits for clear accessibility and operation. Tables and chairs can not extend into the exit pathway. Are the exit lights lit and visible? Check stairwells and corridors. Locked or blocked exits and stairwells KILL!
2. Is your Occupancy Permit and Capacity posted in plain sight? Obey occupancy limits for the comfort and safety of your patrons. Previous disasters most often include a violation of occupancy limits. Today a stampede can be triggered by the slightest mention of a gun, a fight or a fire. Call 286-8207 to inquire about a replacement certificate and the fee. Maximum penalties can be as high as \$10,000 for the first offense, \$15,000 for the second and \$20,000 for the third and each subsequent offence in a calendar year.
3. Monitor your clientele. If you let in outsiders, underage drinkers, or those seeking a confrontation without knowing about local criminal activity, gang action, or flash points for confrontation, it can put the safety of all at risk.
4. Are you using extension cords? They can ONLY be used temporarily (90 days) for seasonal lighting. Multi-outlets can NOT be used at any time with an extension cord. Secure extension cords if used.
5. Are fire extinguishers charged with a current date tag? They need to be checked every year.
6. Are gas cylinders chained to prevent tipping? If tipped and the valve breaks off, it takes off like a rocket. Chains prevent tipping.
7. Check for storage of flammables and combustibles. Are the curtains and decorations flame-resistant? Do you have the certificate to prove it? Are curtains labeled correctly with fire-treatment date stamp?
8. ANY use of pyrotechnics (fireworks) requires a permit. Do you know your performer's routine? Call 286-8210 for permits.
9. Every business is required to have on file a written emergency evacuation plan. Employees are required to be trained on it. Do you know about your plan?
10. More life-safety tips are available from the Department of Neighborhood Services at :

<http://www.milwaukee.gov/dns>

Bar is fined \$39,724 for overcrowding

By JOHN DIERICH
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In what's believed to be the largest bar overcrowding fine ever given in Milwaukee, The Corner tavern on N. Water St. was slapped with a \$39,724 ticket at 2 a.m. Saturday, police said.

Making a random check, officers counted 180 patrons in the bar licensed to hold 100 people, said police spokesman Anne E. Schwartz. The officers emptied the bar and issued the ticket.

The previous high ticket was a \$26,444 ticket given in April to Thai Joe's Bangkok Orchid, 2239 N. Prospect Ave., which was 116 over its limit. That was finalized two weeks ago, said Todd Weller, spokesman for the Department of Neighborhood Services. Thai Joe's has since closed.

Schwartz could not explain why the ticket was higher for The Corner, 1247 N. Water St., even though it was fewer patrons over its capacity.

The Corner manager Mike Sorge said the bar isn't disputing that it was over capacity, but he said every Water St. bar goes over the limit. He said The Corner was unfairly targeted.

"Every bar on this street is overcrowded every weekend night," he said. "They just happened to walk in here. Why didn't they do it to the rest of the street?"

Schwartz said the department recently brought back "tavern cars," patrols dedicated to policing bars for issues like overcrowding and underage drinking.

The stepped-up effort stems from tragedies around the world in which people were killed in overcrowded bars, Schwartz said.

Sorge said the bar's owner is fighting the fine and applying for a higher capacity by proposing physical changes inside the bar.

