

**From the holocaust
which claimed 93 lives
at Our Lady of the Angels
school in Chicago,
every citizen should take
this lesson to heart:
such a tragedy need not
be repeated.**



Death's corridor through which a flash fire raged, trapping more than 200 young pupils.



Fleeing students left these coats behind.



Children in this class were lucky. Exits were not blocked as in adjoining classes.

design, and generally reputed to be the last word in efficiency and safety. But are you sure?

If your last visit to the building was a few years ago, you may be surprised to find some changes. Perhaps lockers now line the halls, for instance.

"We have more kids than we can handle and we need the space," the principal explains. He doesn't realize how serious a fire hazard the corridor lockers could be. (At Our Lady of the Angels, children's clothing hanging in the hall added fuel to the rapidly spreading flames.)

You may find the janitor to be so proud of the building that he has taken to locking the rear exits so all the children will use the front entrance. Perhaps the English teacher has some ambitious ideas for school plays, so extra spotlights have been rigged up over the auditorium stage, overloading the school's wiring—another fire menace.

Such overloaded or defective electrical equipment is the No. 1 cause of school fires. Next, according to the N.F.P.A., come defects in the buildings' heating systems, and carelessness on the part of smokers.

"So far, luck has prevented more fires than any protective measures," says the fire association, "yet fire safety does not necessarily involve any considerable expense; only intelligent thought and action before the fire."

"Today, aroused city officials, school administrators, and fire services throughout the nation are determined that the Chicago tragedy shall not be repeated," says Lewis A. Vincent, general manager of the National Board of Fire Underwriters. The board declares that school safety requires "a properly balanced combination of building construction, fire-extinguishing facilities, means for guarding against fire hazards, regular fire drills, and continuing attention to maintenance."

There are new fire-fighting and detection devices, one so sensitive and speedy it sniffs out trouble and sounds the alarm in seconds—even before flames break out. This nuclear system, called Pyr-a-larm, is triggered by the first faint fumes of combustion. It costs about \$1,800 to install in the average 10-room school, and about \$4,500 in a school of 4,000 enrollment.

The underwriters, who say that many progressive communities now are remodeling schools to

make them safer, have a check list to evaluate how safe a building is. Your local government or the company insuring your school should be able to provide a safety engineer who will make a professional, unbiased safety check.

He would look for such things as enclosed stairways which would provide unhampered exit in case of trouble; fire escapes in good condition; adequate exit doors that are free of obstruction and open outward easily; heating plants in fire-resistant rooms. The safety inspector also would be interested in whether auditorium seats are bolted to the floor to avoid overturning in case of panic; whether boiler pipes are insulated; and how cleaning supplies and trash are stored.

Sad to say, there have been schools in which cartons of paper towels were stored in the boiler room! In others, youngsters always were warned in advance of fire drills; janitors thought fire extinguishers were insect sprays; escape doors were padlocked; and some children were crushed because exit doors opened in, not out.

Dozens of schools have been destroyed because no fire department was available to fight the flames. In scores of cases, there was no water.

"Many times, public officials who desire to get the most out of their school buildings permit alterations without always considering the fire problems," declares one safety official. "Only by the greatest cooperation, from the state commissioner of education down to the newest teacher, can we hope to make our schools safer."

YOUNGSTERS THEMSELVES also can help, judging from the results of the Junior Fire Marshal Program sponsored nationally by a Hartford fire-insurance company. Organized locally by insurance agents, fire departments, and schools, the 12-year-old program has enlisted more than 20 million youngsters in the third to sixth grades. And it's credited with saving many young lives!

In return for showing good fire sense at home and in school, the Junior Fire Marshals get red fire helmets, rings, badges, and a quarterly magazine that tells the fire-prevention story in simple and appealing style. In many communities—such as Albert Lea, Minn.—the children also get special invitations to movie matinees and ball games.

The investment in this program has paid handsome dividends. In Newberg, Ore., and Charleston, W. Va., last year, two Junior Marshals received gold medals for their quick and proper behavior on discovering fires.

In Hinkley, Calif., a 10-year-old Marshal noticed smoke coming from under the door of the school boiler room and gave the alarm. A furnace repairman said the boiler was dry and "could have exploded any minute." But thanks to the boy's quick action, 350 students escaped injury.

In Connecticut, a school caught fire during an electrical storm one night while the volunteer force was fighting flames elsewhere. An 11-year-old Junior Fire Marshal discovered the school blaze and ran to tell the firemen. When the fire chief praised the boy for having saved the building, the youngster's only comment was: "Do you think the other kids will be mad at me?"

Obviously, safety requires the cooperation of students, teachers, parents, and school officials. "Many existing school buildings can be improved and made reasonably fire-safe," say the fire underwriters. "Others have hazards which could be corrected only at such great cost as to make correction impracticable, and where this is the case, use of the buildings should be discontinued. The building may have been used for many years, but that is no proof that fire may not strike tomorrow with tragic loss of life."

America should not need another tragedy to realize, as the U.S. Office of Education put it: "Pupils are perishable, but not expendable!"

Recommended Literature on School Safety

These are some publications offering guidance on greater school safety:

School Fires, National Fire Protection Assn., 60 Batterymarch St., Boston 10, Mass., 50 cents.

Check List of Safety and Safety Education in Your School, National Education Assn., 1201 Sixteenth St., N.W., Washington 6, D. C., 50 cents.

School Fire Safety, Bulletin 1951, No. 13, Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington 25, D. C., 20 cents.

Inspection Blank for Schools, National Board of Fire Underwriters, 85 John St., New York 38, N. Y., free.