

## Keeping Workers Safe on the Job

Workplaces in the United States were once very dangerous because they were governed by no formal safety laws. Officials thought that private businesses should set their own rules. Many business owners were more concerned with profits, however, than with safety. This attitude sometimes led to unsafe working conditions.

In 1911 the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire took place in New York City. This tragedy, and others like it, angered people. The New York legislature began to look into working conditions in buildings. The Division of Fire Prevention was created to rid buildings of fire hazards. It developed new fire codes. For instance, the new fire code required that all doors open outward. They also had to remain unlocked during business hours. Businesses having more than 25 workers had to install sprinkler systems. Fire escapes had to be able to carry the weight of workers. These and other codes helped to ensure a safe workplace for all.

There are other safety issues besides fire danger. In 1970 Congress passed the Occupational Safety and Health Act, which states that all people have the right to a safe and healthful workplace. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) was formed. OSHA has had a great impact on the workplace. It sets and enforces workplace safety laws. It provides workers with safety and health facts and information and also helps employers to comply with safety codes. OSHA can help workers who think that their workplace is unsafe. Any worker may file a complaint with OSHA.

OSHA provides safety rules. This agency also helps to keep workers safe in other ways. One way is by requiring them to wear safety gear such as goggles or gloves. Another is by limiting the contact a worker has with harmful chemicals.

OSHA helps to save lives and prevent harm in the workplace. Since 1970 workplace deaths have declined 50 percent. In 1988 job-related injury and illness rates were the lowest on record. However, for 100 million workers and 6 million work sites in the United States, there are only about 2,500 OSHA inspectors. Workers must take an active role in their own safety. They should comply with posted safety rules, and they should report any breach of rules right away. If possible, employees and employers should work together to resolve safety issues. Sometimes an employer refuses to make needed changes. OSHA can then be called in to enforce federal standards.

### Recalling Facts

1. Working conditions before the establishment of OSHA were
  - ☐ a. not so safe as they are today.
  - ☐ b. very safe.
  - ☐ c. a high priority to business owners.
2. The Occupational Safety and Health Act was passed in
  - ☐ a. 1911.
  - ☐ b. 1988.
  - ☐ c. 1970.
3. Keeping all doors unlocked during business hours is an example of
  - ☐ a. air-quality control.
  - ☐ b. a fire-safety code.
  - ☐ c. being overly cautious.
4. The Occupational Safety and Health Act was passed by
  - ☐ a. the president of the United States.
  - ☐ b. the governor of New York.
  - ☐ c. Congress.
5. An example of required safety equipment is
  - ☐ a. woolen socks.
  - ☐ b. goggles.
  - ☐ c. a wristwatch.

### Understanding Ideas

6. One can conclude from the passage that workplace safety
  - ☐ a. will not be a concern in the future.
  - ☐ b. will continue to improve.
  - ☐ c. will begin to decline.
7. From the passage, one can conclude that
  - ☐ a. unsafe conditions were responsible for the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire tragedy.
  - ☐ b. the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire was the work of an arsonist.
  - ☐ c. the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire was an unusual incident.
8. Compared with workplaces in the nineteenth century, workplaces today are
  - ☐ a. safer.
  - ☐ b. less safe.
  - ☐ c. about as safe as they were then.
9. It is likely that Congress passed federal laws to mandate workplace safety
  - ☐ a. at the insistence of business owners.
  - ☐ b. before a factory disaster occurred.
  - ☐ c. because of incidents such as the Triangle Shirtwaist Fire.
10. In order to ensure workplace safety, one can conclude that
  - ☐ a. fewer regulations are needed by OSHA.
  - ☐ b. everyone ultimately must take responsibility for his or her own safety.
  - ☐ c. a representative from OSHA should be employed by every company.

## The Triangle Shirtwaist Fire

In early 1911, the Triangle Shirtwaist Company was in business in New York City. It employed almost 500 people. Many of these were young women between 19 and 23 years old. Many were immigrants. They had come from other countries hoping for a better life.

Work at the factory was hard. Workers were paid little for their time. They worked long hours. On March 25, shortly after 4:30 P.M., fire broke out in the factory. At the time, 275 women were in the building, and 146 died.

Some or all of these deaths probably could have been avoided. The building had no safety procedures. Doors opened inward instead of outward. The building had no sprinkler systems. Many of the doors were locked. This trapped the victims in the fire because they were unable to open the doors to escape. There were only 27 buckets of water to douse the fire. Fire hoses and ladders did not reach beyond the seventh floor. The fire escapes could not support the weight of the workers trying to leave. The fire escapes collapsed, trapping the workers inside the burning building.

The Triangle Shirtwaist Fire was the worst fire in the history of New York up to that time. As a result of this fire, many important safety regulations were put into place in the United States.

**1. Recognizing Words in Context**

Find the word *douse* in the passage.

One definition below is closest to the meaning of that word. One definition has the opposite or nearly the opposite meaning. The remaining definition has a completely different meaning. Label the definitions C for *closest*, O for *opposite or nearly opposite*, and D for *different*.

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. drench
- \_\_\_\_\_ b. throw off
- \_\_\_\_\_ c. make do

**2. Distinguishing Fact from Opinion**

Two of the statements below present *facts*, which can be proved. The other statement is an *opinion*, which expresses someone's thoughts or beliefs. Label the statements F for *fact* and O for *opinion*.

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. The Triangle Shirtwaist Company had no safety procedures.
- \_\_\_\_\_ b. The Triangle Shirtwaist Company factory did not provide means of escape.
- \_\_\_\_\_ c. The Triangle Shirtwaist Company was concerned only with making a profit.

### 3. Keeping Events in Order

Number the statements below 1, 2, and 3 to show the order in which the events took place.

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. One hundred forty-six workers died.
- \_\_\_\_\_ b. Employees were working at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company.
- \_\_\_\_\_ c. Fire broke out in the building.

### 4. Making Correct Inferences

Two of the statements below are correct *inferences*, or reasonable guesses. They are based on information in the passage. The other statement is an incorrect, or faulty, inference. Label the statements C for *correct* inference and F for *faulty* inference.

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. Having safety procedures in place can help prevent worker deaths.
- \_\_\_\_\_ b. All workplace deaths can be prevented.
- \_\_\_\_\_ c. Workplaces can be dangerous.

### 5. Understanding Main Ideas

One of the statements below expresses the main idea of the passage. One statement is too general, or too broad. The other explains only part of the passage; it is too narrow. Label the statements M for *main idea*, B for *too broad*, and N for *too narrow*.

- \_\_\_\_\_ a. The Triangle Shirtwaist fire was a devastating event that had long-term effects on building-safety regulations.
- \_\_\_\_\_ b. Most employees at the Triangle Shirtwaist Company were women.
- \_\_\_\_\_ c. A factory can be an unsafe place to work.

Correct Answers, Part A \_\_\_\_\_

Correct Answers, Part B \_\_\_\_\_

Total Correct Answers \_\_\_\_\_