



The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire



by Jacqueline Dembar Greene



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Consultant: David Von Drehle

Author of *Triangle: The Fire That Changed America*

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Fire!

It was late afternoon on Saturday, March 25, 1911. At the Triangle Waist Company in New York City, factory workers were finishing their day. All week long they had cut and **stitched** pieces of cloth to make **shirtwaists**. Soon they could collect their pay and go home. On Sunday, they could rest.

Sewing rooms in factories were often crowded with workers and cloth.



Suddenly, Eva Harris ran across the workroom on the eighth floor. She squeezed past tables piled with cotton cloth.

“Fire!” she shouted. Samuel Bernstein, the manager, saw smoky flames near the cutting tables. Workers grabbed buckets filled with water.



In the early 1900s, women wore long skirts and blouses called shirtwaists.

About 500 people worked at the Triangle factory the day of the fire. Most were women. Many were Italian or Jewish **immigrants**. Some were as young as 14 years old.

Where Is the Water?

Workmen threw buckets of water on the flames, but the fire raced across the room. Huge bins of cloth scraps hadn't been emptied for weeks. The cloth burst into flames.

The men pulled a fire hose from the wall. Samuel Bernstein turned the nozzle, but nothing came out.

"Where is the water?" he cried.



The Triangle Waist Company took up the top three floors of the Asch Building. At ten floors, the building was one of New York City's new **skyscrapers**.

The Asch Building

Women tried to get out. Flames blocked one of the doors. So workers ran to the second door—but it was locked! They screamed, beating the locked door with their fists. A factory worker, Louis Brown, pushed the women aside. Using a key, he was able to open the door. Workers streamed down the stairs.

“Flames were already blazing fiercely and spreading fast. If we couldn’t get out we would all be roasted alive.”

—Rosie Safran, factory worker



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About the Author

Jacqueline Dembar Greene is an award-winning author of more than 20 fiction and nonfiction books and stories, including *The 2001 World Trade Center Attack*. She has illustrated some of her nonfiction books with original photographs. Learn more at www.jdgbooks.com.



The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire

It was almost the end of the workday at the Triangle Waist Company. Suddenly a woman shouted "Fire!" Workers pulled a fire hose from the wall. The factory manager turned the nozzle, but nothing came out.

The fire quickly blazed across the floor. Panicked workers struggled to escape. Some ran down the stairs or crammed into elevators. Others raced to the roof. Even so, 146 workers lost their lives due to locked doors, blocked exits, and a poorly built fire escape. Anger and grief over their deaths led to changes that are still keeping people safe today.

The *Challenger* Space Shuttle Explosion

Emergency at Three Mile Island

The *Exxon Valdez's* Deadly Oil Spill

The Great Chicago Fire

The *Hindenburg* Disaster

Nightmare on the *Titanic*

The Texas City Disaster

The Triangle Shirtwaist Factory Fire

The 2001 World Trade Center Attack

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