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Inspections reveal thousands of safety hazards

Numerous establishments have been shut down as a result of the inspections, which were ordered by Governor Carcieri in the aftermath of the fire at The Station.

03/15/2003

BY MARK ARSENAULT
Journal Staff Writer

A statewide inspection blitz through hundreds of places of assembly has so far turned up thousands of possible safety hazards, inspection reports show.

Governor Carcieri ordered the inspections after fireworks used to open a rock show at The Station nightclub last month ignited packing foam used as soundproofing around the stage. The flames consumed the building in minutes, killing 99 people and injuring some 190. It is the fourth-deadliest nightclub fire in U.S. history.

Numerous establishments have been shut down as a result of the inspections.

Nearly 800 reports generated by the inspectors became available yesterday. The one-page survey forms were hastily created in the aftermath of the fire to list for inspectors the essential information

necessary for the statewide survey.

The forms include checkoff lists for inspectors to approve aspects of the building, or to cite code violations. Problems are explained with a sentence or two of detail.

The categories of inspection include: egress corridors and doors, stairways, aisles and seating, exit signs, emergency lighting, fire-extinguishing equipment and construction style of the building. Inspectors also record whether each building has a fire-alarm system, dance floors and sprinklers and note the general upkeep of each establishment.

The vast majority of the reports released yesterday show potential problems -- often numerous problems -- in places where large numbers of people routinely gather.

For example:

Fifty-four inspection reports were available yesterday for Cranston establishments. Nearly every report cited a problem to be corrected, with egress among the most common. Inspectors found possible impediments to escaping the buildings -- mostly problems with hallways or doors -- in 38 of the 54 establishments.

The inspectors found tables blocking doors, doors that failed to meet height requirements, key locks on exit doors, exits blocked by debris, and problems specified on the reports only as "code violation."

The flammable packing foam used as soundproofing at The Station is blamed for the quick spread of the Feb. 20 fire. Inspectors made specific note of "decorative and acoustical materials" in the recent inspection blitz, and noted numerous problems. In Cranston, for example, 45 of the 54 reports show problems in this category.

Inspectors cited artificial plants that were not fire retardant, improper curtains and blinds, rugs on walls and numerous instances of decorations that were not fire rated.

INSPECTORS found that most of the well-known Providence nightspots had potential safety problems to correct.

At the Met Cafe, inspectors cited egress problems, a security grille at an exit door, missing handrails, a broken exit sign, inadequate emergency lighting, fire-extinguisher violations and drapes that did not meet the code.

At the Living Room, inspectors flagged broken hardware on an exit door, broken and missing handrails, emergency lights that were not bright enough, and fire-extinguisher violations.

Inspectors noted "numerous" safety problems at the Complex, and a number of problems at Lupo's Heartbreak Hotel.

The report for the Cadillac Lounge lists problems with doors and two battery units failing in an emergency lighting test. At Club Hell, a basement stairway was not properly enclosed, according to the report. There was a missing exit sign and two signs failed an emergency test. Emergency lighting was insufficient and drapes and curtains did not meet code.

At AS220, inspectors cited the need for more signs, lighting and another handrail. **At the Strand, they noted expired flame retardant on decorative or acoustical materials.**

Inspectors flagged several safety concerns at The Foxy Lady, such as problems with doors, drapes, furniture encroaching in aisles, lack of testing of fire-suppression system, and a missing exit sign. The Satin Doll needed more emergency lighting installed, and inspectors found that some flame retardant had expired at club Fantasies.

THE CITY establishments are not alone; inspectors cited possible safety hazards in facilities statewide.

The inspection at the Shelter Harbor Inn in Westerly found problems with egress doors, exit signs and emergency lighting.

Inspectors visiting the Lincoln Country Club, in Lincoln, cited problems with egress passageways, doors that swung the wrong way, and a need for more exit signs and fire extinguishers.

The India restaurant in Warren had unlit exit signs and problems with emergency lighting and extinguishers. Inspectors in Newport noted exit-sign and emergency-lighting problems at the Newport Blues Cafe.

Inspectors at the Atwood Grill of Warwick found chairs obstructing exit passages, a screen door that swung the wrong way, "numerous" emergency lights out and flammable decorative material.

Though perfect reports were the exception, inspectors noted no hazards at some establishments, including Copperfields Lounge in Warwick, and the Pawtucket Country Club.

With reports from W. Zachary Malinowski.

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