

# Fire Investigation Summary

## Dance Hall Fire

Gothenburg, Sweden  
October 28, 1998



A quick moving fire in a crowded dance hall resulted in the deaths of 63 people.



Approximately 400 people were in attendance when the fire broke out. The dance hall had been licensed to hold a maximum of 150 people.



Factors contributing to the loss of life in this incident include the overcrowded conditions in the hall, combustible storage in a stairwell and the lack of a fire alarm system in the building.



National Fire Protection Association  
Fire Investigations Department

On Thursday evening, October 28, 1998, a fire occurred in a nightclub in Gothenburg, Sweden. A Halloween party was being held in the second floor hall, and officials estimated that there were approximately 400 people in attendance. Prior to the fire, the Gothenburg, Mölndal, Kungsbacka Fire Brigade had determined the maximum occupancy should have been 150 people.

The hall where the party was being held measured 32 meters (105 feet) by 9.5 meters (31 feet). There were two exits located at each end of the hall. Each exit was equipped with a door that had an opening approximately 800 mm (31.5 in.) wide. The doors swung outward in the direction of travel and led to stairways that measured 1.5 m (4.9 ft) wide.

The main stairway on the northwest end discharged directly to the exterior. The other stairway on the southeast end discharged into a corridor on the first floor that people would have had to travel through before reaching the exterior. A stage was located on the southeast end where a disc jockey had set up his equipment.

The building was constructed of a combination of concrete and masonry block. The ceiling was suspended acoustical tile, but the exact composition of the interior finish in the hall itself is unknown. Approximately 1.2 m (4 ft) of wainscoting was attached to the corridor wall leading into the hall. It was reported that there were decorations hung in the hall for the party and that there were a number of flags on the walls.

There were no automatic fire sprinkler or fire alarm systems in the building. There

were lighted exit signs at each end of the hall.

There were a series of eight windows on the northeast wall, six of which were in the hall itself. These windows measured 1.8 m by 0.8 m (5.9 ft by 2.6 ft) and the bottom of the windows were 2.2 m (7.2 ft) above the floor.

On the southwest wall were five similar windows. These windows, however, were equipped with security bars to prevent intrusion.

Shortly before midnight, the disc jockey opened the door leading to the southeast stairwell. Smoke from a fire in the stairwell came into the hall. It is unknown if the door was closed again after the fire was detected. Because of the fire, this stairway was impassable and was not used during the evacuation.

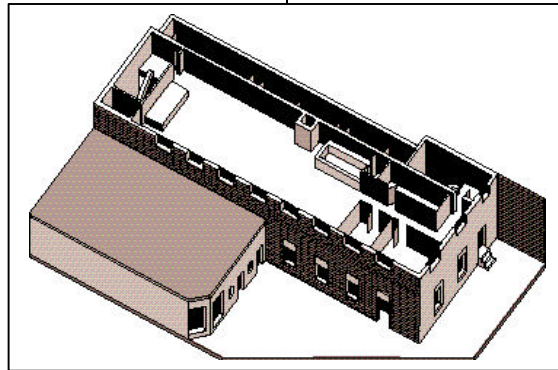
Using a mobile telephone, the disc jockey called the fire brigade. Realizing how crowded the hall was and that he would not be able to make it through the crowd, the disc jockey then broke out a window in the northeast wall and jumped out of the building.

The dispatcher who received the call reporting the fire had some difficulty ascertaining the address of the fire because of the background noise. The dispatcher was eventually able to do so, and an initial response of an engine and a ladder with a total of eight fire fighters was dispatched.

The first fire brigade units arrived on the scene from a fire station located 2.2 km (1.4 mi) away. As they approached the complex from the far side, an officer reported light smoke visible and thought that it might be a container fire. As they

turned the corner, they were able to see the building on fire and the officer realized that it was a major fire. He requested the dispatch of additional units, but the units had already been dispatched, based on additional telephone calls being received by the alarm room.

There were a large number of people blocking the fire apparatus access to the scene. The officer had to walk in front of the apparatus to get people to clear the way and allow the fire fighters to approach the building.



As the officer approached the building, he observed a number of injured people lying on the ground who had jumped from the second story windows. Because of the injured people lying on the ground below the windows, fire fighters were unable to place ground ladders up to the windows on the northeast side of the building.

The officer and his fire fighters then attempted to enter the building through the main entrance at the northwest end. It was reported that the stairway was blocked with a tangle of injured people. These people had to be dragged outside before the fire fighters were able to proceed up the stairs.

When they reached the top of the stairs, they were faced with a wall of bodies inside of the door to the hall. It was reported that the bodies were packed in tight, from the floor to the top of the

doorway. The fire fighters started removing the bodies and quickly passing them down the stairs to the exterior of the building. As they removed the bodies from the pile in the doorway, others from inside the burning hall attempted to climb out through the openings that had just been created.

As water was being applied through one of the windows on the northeast side, a fire fighter in breathing apparatus entered the building through one of the windows, dropping 2.2 m (7.2 ft) to the floor.

The fire fighter then continued to advance into the building. It was reported that people were pulling at him as he made his way in and that his mask was almost pulled from his face. He stated that the interior was dark, smoky, and hot, but that there was not any heavy fire involvement at this time.

A total of 63 people died in this fire, mostly from smoke inhalation. Their ages ranged from 14-to 20-years-old. One hundred eighty people were injured. The fire brigade estimated that they rescued 40 to 50 people.

Based on NFPA's investigation and analysis of this fire, the following significant factors were considered as having contributed to the loss of life and property in this incident:

- **Overcrowding,**
- **Lack of a fire alarm system,**
- **Ignition of combustible storage in a stairwell**

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