**Assignment:**
It is March 25th, 1911 and you are the chief prosecutor for the city of New York. You have been called to the scene of a major factory fire where 146 people have been killed in a huge fire. You need to determine if this was simply an accident, or should someone be charged with a crime for the death of all of these people.

Examine the evidence carefully and work with your group to form a conclusion. Decide together if you are going to proceed to trial. If you are going to trial, you need to decide who you are blaming and with what crime. If no one is going to trial, you need to explain why. In addition, as prosecutor you need to make recommendations to the city of New York so that this will never happen again.

Use the charts below to help you analyze the information in the evidence file. Please review all files carefully and document your conclusions and evidence below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PROBLEM</th>
<th>WHO IS TO BLAME? WHY?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scraps of cloth lying around, material quickly and easily caught fire</td>
<td>The factory foreman and owners who did not have a proper system in place to dispose of scraps</td>
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As prosecutor, what are your conclusions? Should the owners of the factory be put on trial for the deaths of their employees? Explain. (Complete sentences, be prepared to share)

As prosecutor and chief investigator, what are your conclusions about preventing a future tragedy like this? What should be changed in order to prevent this from happening again? (Bullet point)
Forensic Report / Initial Report

Date:
March 25th, 1911

Location:
Triangle Shirtwaist Factory
8th, 9th, and 10th floor of Asch Building
Northwest Corner of Greene Street and Washington Place, NYC

Ownership:
Max Blanck and Isaac Harris
Factory produced women’s blouses, known as ‘shirtwaists’
The factory employs 500 workers, mostly young immigrant women
The employees worked nine hours a day on weekdays plus seven hours on Saturdays, earning about $9 a week

Initial Report: A fire flared up at approximately 4:40 PM in a scrap bin under one of the cutter's tables at the northeast corner of the eighth floor. At 9:20 the fire was extinguished and 146 people were killed. (129 women and 17 men.)
POLICE COMMISSIONER’S REPORT ON FACTORY SAFETY CONDITIONS IN NYC FACTORIES
APRIL 10TH, 1911 (ABOUT A MONTH BEFORE THE FIRE)

With 23,832 persons working in factories above the 6th floor, 60 feet above the sidewalk, the following dangerous conditions have been found in all of the shops without exception:

1. All loft buildings are divided and subdivided into many sections by flimsy wooden, highly inflammable partitions, offering ready material for flames, and at the same time obstructing passages to exits.

2. All shops contain inflammable materials, floors are littered with scraps of woolen and cotton goods and filled with large pine packing boxes.

3. Of the 1,414 loft buildings in which the shops are located, only 128 are provided with automatic sprinklers, and only 15 have practiced some sort of fire drill.

Through our investigation, we also found the following defects in fire-escape facilities and are in found in some of the shops.

| Shops in buildings without any fire escapes | 63 |
| Fire escapes with no or badly placed drop ladders | 236 |
| Shops with openings to fire escapes obstructed | 250 |
| Doors in shops opening in | 2,379 |
| Doors in shops found to be LOCKED during working hours | 257 |
| Chemical fire extinguishers lacking | 1,604 |

In the commissioner’s opinion, the above conditions are dangerous and unacceptable and radical changes need to be made. The power of the State must be invoked and laws changed in order to fix the above conditions.
Eye-Witness Testimony

Louis Waldman described the scene to a policeman the following day:

One Saturday afternoon I was sitting at one of the reading tables in the old Astor Library... It was a raw, unpleasant day and the comfortable reading room seemed a delightful place to spend the remaining few hours until the library closed. I was deeply engrossed in my book when I became aware of fire engines racing past the building. By this time I was sufficiently Americanized to be fascinated by the sound of fire engines. Along with several others in the library, I ran out to see what was happening, and followed crowds of people to the scene of the fire.

A few blocks away, the Asch Building at the corner of Washington Place and Greene Street was ablaze. When we arrived at the scene, the police had thrown up a cordon around the area and the firemen were helplessly fighting the blaze. The eighth, ninth, and tenth stories of the building were now an enormous roaring cornice of flames.

Word had spread through the East Side, by some magic of terror, that the plant of the Triangle Waist Company was on fire and that several hundred workers were trapped. Horrified and helpless, the crowds — I among them — looked up at the burning building, saw girl after girl appear at the reddened windows, pause for a terrified moment, and then leap to the pavement below, to land as mangled, bloody pulp. This went on for what seemed a ghastly eternity. Occasionally a girl who had hesitated too long was licked by pursuing flames and, screaming with clothing and hair ablaze, plunged like a living torch to the street. Life nets held by the firemen were torn by the impact of the falling bodies.

The emotions of the crowd were indescribable. Women were hysterical, scores fainted; men wept as, in paroxysms of frenzy, they hurled themselves against the police lines.

Bessie Gabrilowitch, a survivor and employee of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory:

I ran frantically first to the main door but found it locked. I luckily found an open stairway near the freight elevator. I blindly made my way through the smoke to the street below and I looked up to find my friends leaping from the windows of the upper stories. My friend Dora Wolfovitch was one of the women that jumped and she was only 15 years old. Everybody was running to get out, but so many did not make it.
Max Rothen – a cloth cutter on the 8th floor

Myself and several other cutters tried to extinguish the flames using buckets of water. But before we could put out the blaze, patterns that were hanging on long wires used to store cut fabric began to burn. I began tearing down the flaming cloth, but the fire was ahead of me and spreading rapidly. Wood tables and chairs quickly ignited. Oil that had dripped from sewing machines covered the wood floor, and bundles of flimsy, combustible cloth and tissue paper lay everywhere.

Zito Mortillalo, office employee, operating the elevator on March 11th during the fire

I began operating the elevators as fast as I could as soon as I became aware of the fire. As the situation became more desperate, panicked people jammed the elevators up to double our 10-person capacity. Some tried to slide down the cables after the elevator cars departed; and still others fell or jumped down the elevator shafts to escape the flames. On my last trip, I could only get as high as the 7th floor, the elevator tracks had warped from the heat. As the elevator returned to the lobby, I heard the thump of bodies landing on the roof. When I got to ground level, the roof of the elevator buckled and the elevator was unable to move because of the bodies piled on the roof as people leaped on to the elevator shaft.

Mario Panno, 8th floor bookkeeper and telephone operator

I frantically phones the 10th floor where the executive offices were located to alert them to the danger. I later found out that the 60 10th floor employees, including the owners of the company, were able to exit to the roof and out of harms way. I then attempted to alert the 9th floor, but the calls, routed through the 10th floor switchboard, were never answered. The first the 9th floor knew of the fire must have been when smoke and flames began to billow past the windows. The employees on the 9th floor, some 300 of them, began to rush for the exits.
Providenzo Goldstein, 8th floor garment worker

We weren’t warned. We had no time. The fire began to creep past the windows and we began to smell smoke. We all began to rush for the exits, there was chaos. The smoke filled up the room past and I heard people screaming. Some people made it down the Greene Street stairs before the fire spread into the stairwell and cut off our escape. The other stairwell was locked. The owners always locked the doors so we wouldn’t take breaks and they could check our purses for stolen belongings on our way out. With the stairways blocked, I tried the fire escape, but a heavy metal shutter blocked our way out. Some women tried to climb around it, but this slowed the flow of traffic and a crowd backed up and overloaded the fire escape, which collapsed and sent many women to their death in the courtyard below. I was one of the lucky ones and made it onto the last elevator. Many of my friends did not make it and were forced to jump in a desperate attempt to avoid the fire.

Casey Cavanaugh, firefighter at the scene

When we first arrived at the scene I thought I saw piles of fabric on the sidewalk. I soon realized, however, they were bodies of girls who had jumped to their deaths. More would continue to come for the next 10 minutes. Our department fire ladders could not reach the engulfed floors. We tried, they just didn’t reach. We brought out life nets, but the devices – so effective in rescuing jumpers from lesser heights in other fires, proved useless in catching people from such a height. The nets would tear and bodies continued to hit the ground. There was ultimately nothing we could do but watch. I will never forget that day.

Ethel Monick, 9th floor worker, age 16

I seen the fire and then I seen all the girls rushing down to the place to escape. So I tried to go through the Greene Street door, and there were quick girls there and I seen I can't get out there, so I went to the elevator, and then I heard the elevator fall down, so I ran through to the Washington Place side, and I went over to the Washington Place side and there wasn't any girls there, so I ran over the doors and none was over there. So I went over to the door. I tried the door and I could not open it, so I thought I was not strong enough to open it, so I hollered girls here is a door, and they all rushed over and they tried to open it, but it was locked and they hollered "the door is locked and we can't open it!"
1. Shortly before 4:45 scraps of cloth clippings in wooden boxes sored under cutting tables caught fire, possibly from a carelessly disposed cigarette. (see picture B)

2. The men working the cutting tables ran to get buckets of water to extinguish the fire – the company’s “fire protection” consisted of 27 buckets distributed among the three floors – but before they could douse it, patterns and fabric hung on wires above the tables caught fire and the flames began to spread rapidly.

3. The factory floor was so crowded that the workers began trampling one another to escape. (see picture A)

4. The fire was quickly out of control and the only course now was escape. The narrow, steep wooden stairs were only 33 inches wide, more typical of a small home than a commercial building.

5. The door in the Washington Place stairwell was locked to prevent employees from taking unauthorized breaks or stealing company property. All exit doors opened inward. By locking the door, at least 100 people were trapped inside the 8th floor.

6. The exterior fire escapes were worse, only 17.5 inches wide, and only went as far as the second floor. (see picture C)

7. The fire escape, cheaply constructed in order to bring the building in compliance with exit codes for high occupancy factory spaces, emptied into a small, enclosed courtyard that served principally as an air and light shaft. It had no means of egress, or no way out. (see picture D)

8. The remaining means of exit, two elevator shafts, with two wars with operators, running as fast as possible, could not come close to accommodating the throngs of people frantically ringing the service bell.

9. The fire trucks did not have ladders that could reach the top floors and they had no effective way to catch the women as they jumped. (see picture E and F)