

# TEACHER'S GUIDE

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### MISSION 4: "City of Immigrants"

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#### Factory Safety Report, 1912

*Published by the New York State Factory Investigating Commission in 1912, and in response to the Triangle Shirtwaist fire, this report calls for new laws that will make factory work safer and healthier, and will prevent future tragedies. The report notes that factory work is more dangerous and leads to more disease than other types of work, and that making factories safer will not only save lives, but will be less expensive for companies than paying for damages after another fire.*

REPORT to the LEGISLATURE OF THE STATE OF NEW YORK  
By the NEW YORK STATE FACTORY INVESTIGATING COMMISSION (EXCERPT)

On Saturday afternoon, March 25, 1911, a fire took place in the business establishment of the Triangle Waist Company, at No. 23-29 Washington Place, in the Borough of Manhattan, City of New York, in which 145 employees, mainly women and girls lost their lives.

This shocking loss of life aroused the community to a full sense of its responsibility. A superficial (quick) examination revealed conditions in factories and manufacturing establishments that constituted a daily menace to the lives of the thousands of working men, women and children. Lack of precautions to prevent fire, inadequate fire-escape facilities, insanitary (sic) conditions that were insidiously undermining (harmful to) the health of the workers were found existing everywhere. The need of a thorough and extensive investigation into the general conditions of factory life was clearly recognized.

The commission was authorized by the Legislature to inquire into the existing conditions under which manufacturing was carried on in so-called loft buildings and otherwise, including matters affecting the health and safety of the operatives (workers) as well as the security and best interests of the public.

#### IMPORTANCE OF INVESTIGATION

Health is the principal asset of the working man and the working woman. The state is bound to do everything in its power to preserve the health of the workers who contribute so materially to its economic wealth and its industrial prosperity.

Aside from the humanitarian aspect of the situation, economic considerations demand from the State the careful supervision and protection of its workers. Failure to perform this obligation will produce serious results in the workers of the future. It will affect the working capacity of the future generation.

The State not only possesses the power and the right, but it is charged with the sacred duty of seeing that the worker is properly safeguarded (protected) in case of fire; that he is protected from accidents

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caused by neglect or indifference; that proper precautions are taken to prevent poisoning by the materials and processes of his industry, and that he works under conditions conducive to good health, and not such as breed disease.

Factory workers particularly need protection and supervision. Among them disease more easily finds its victims than among other classes of workers. Statistics show the greater mortality of those engaged in factory work, as compared with those in other occupations.

Fires and industrial accidents are fortunately only occasional and extraordinary events. Their effects are visible and immediate so they are impressed forcibly upon our minds. But the common, everyday incidents of industrial life, the lack of ventilation (fresh air), the long hours of labor amid insanitary (sic) surroundings, these work unnoticed, but the toll of human life they exact (take) is very great.

A general awakening has taken place throughout the State. A far larger number of inspections by authorities have been made than ever before. No great reliance, however, can be placed upon such a momentary or spasmodic awakening. When its cause is no longer present, conditions relapse into their former state, and there is little real improvement.

To improve the industrial situation permanently, clear, concise and comprehensive legislation (law-making) is needed.

Source: New York (State) Factory Investigating Commission, Preliminary Report of the Factory Investigating Commission, 1912. (Albany, New York: The Argus Company, 1912), vol. 1, pp. 13-20.