

Nightclubs across the country taking precautions to prevent injuries, deaths

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CHICAGO (KRT) — Confronted by a staggering death toll from nightclub disasters in Chicago and Rhode Island, city inspectors and music club owners around the country have been jolted into critical examinations of safety procedures.

Under the cover of night, local authorities are fanning out across communities, making spot checks at odd hours and searching for possible building and fire code violations at nightclubs, often crowded, boisterous and sometimes dangerous establishments.

More than 115 people died in the two nightclub

incidents, which occurred just four days apart, tragedies that involved building code or fire violations and masses of trapped partygoers who didn't — or couldn't — use all the available exits.

In Chicago, where a panicked human stampede at the E2 nightclub on the South Side caused 21 deaths, the Fire Department stepped up inspections at nightclubs, concerts and other large venues over the weekend and will continue to do so indefinitely.

Jam Productions, which produces shows across the city, and Metro, a live music venue, are now making pre-show announcements about the location of alternative exits. In the lobbies, they

have begun making emergency procedure information available.

Teen clubs will also get a close look. As a preventive measure, DuPage County, Ill., officials are reviewing safety conditions at Zero Gravity in Naperville, Ill., which caters to 16- to 22-year-olds.

"Most people don't think about it," said Jam Productions' Jerry Mickelson. "Now it's time."

At The Station concert club in Rhode Island, at least 96 people died in a blazing fire late Thursday started by an illegal pyrotechnics display by the rock band Great White.

According to early reports, the club appar-

ently met most, if not all, state and local building codes, although officials said the bar was over its capacity of 300.

The club was not required to have sprinklers because of its size, a now controversial issue that officials are re-examining. Rhode Island Gov. Don Carcieri said Friday that the legislature also planned a review of state building codes.

In the U.S., there are no nationally mandated building and fire codes to accommodate regional differences such as earthquakes and tornadoes.

Instead, municipalities adopt their own. Though national safety standards are published by the National Fire Protection Association and other

organizations, they are not uniformly adopted or enforced, which is a growing problem, according to crowd management experts.

With fractured and often unknown regulations, many clubs operate in a gray area. In some cases, building owners may change a building's design or function after it has met codes. Or, more commonly, they simply pack too many people into a club.

"The problem isn't just the design of a building, it's the operation," said Jake Pauls, a consultant in building safety, who says existing codes are outdated. "There is a reluctance on the part of industry to establish standards. Usually the

motives of a rock concert promoter are not about public safety but to get maximum economic return."

In Chicago, some inspections now will be random while others will be in response to complaints and tips about crowded and dangerous conditions that have come in following the E2 tragedy, said one city official, who asked not to be identified.

"(The two tragedies) are a wake-up call for all of us," said Bill Fitzgerald, owner of FitzGerald's nightclub in Berwyn, Ill., who just installed a state-of-the-art fire detection system and is considering making emergency exit

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and this year is the first for students. "I really think that next year is going to be the trying year," said Chief Bell, because, "We're getting ready for our next phase — to gate up a commuters lot."

Every student, including commuters, are able to have a parking space on this campus if they have a decal. The problem is that few people want to park in their assigned area, which in turn, causes problems. The gravel lot by the track is hardly ever full, but commuters choose to park in residence hall lots. The Rams Commons lot is never full, although those residents choose to park in

the Wilson lot, forcing many of their residents to have no place to park in their own lot.

Although, when the Wilson lot is full, "People can park anywhere on this campus as long as it is after 5 p.m. and your vehicle is removed by 8 a.m. the next morning," said Officer Norris Gullick "The Ticket Man."

That is true not only for Wilson Hall residents, but everybody, as long as the space is not labeled "Reserved."

Officer James Lewis brought up another issue for thought. "I think the Rams lot should be interchangeable," he said. Half of the spaces (more than 200) in that lot are available throughout the day. Perhaps commuters

could park there, also. James said "At night, [commuters] are not here, and therefore it won't affect Rams Commons residents."

Bell also had this in mind and said, "Next year we will survey and decide if we will sell [Commons lot decals] to commuters and Wilson residents."

So once the gates are working, all the parking problems will be solved then, right?

According to Gullick, no, and they are already prepared for problems with students trying to break and tamper with the gates, so students should think twice before interfering because he says, "We have backups."

For students who are parking on Vargrave or

in the Wilson lot instead of in their assigned one, because of safety (not laziness) issues, Bell wants to make people aware that there are digital cameras in the Rams Commons lot and Wilson's lot will be receiving cameras shortly for safety and security issues. Brown Hall also has a camera showing all who enter and exit, as well as the lot. In addition, the student patrol runs Sunday through Thursday and students always have the police to call on. Stated in the memo concerning parking on Vargrave that Bell sent out, were the words, "We are having cars sideswiped ... fire truck egress is being blocked ... fire hydrant access is being blocked ... and these are safety

issues."

Although vehicles were parked on Vargrave Street the entire fall semester and the entire month of January with only a ticket as punishment, towed vehicles on Vargrave are certainly not unfamiliar with students now. It's nearing the end of the semester, and those who do not have decals might be deterred from buying them for that very reason.

What some students don't know is that decals are pro-rated and are now only \$35, and that price is decreasing. Unpaid citations can prohibit you from registering, receiving refund checks or graduating.

Gullick said, "We're trying to make it safe for all."

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derful addition to an already valuable and sought after internship."

Students had the opportunity to take part in courses that include Communications, Experiential Learning for the 21st Century, Hospitality Management, Organizational Leadership, College Program Practicum and the Disney Leadership Sparkers Series.

Williams does warn, however, that any students thinking of participating should make sure that they have the time to take off from school before they make the trek to the magic kingdom.

Recruitment will take place April 3 at 5 p.m. in the Thompson Center.



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