

**FIRE PROTECTION HISTORY-PART 111: 1929
(LIFE SAFETY TESTING)**

By Richard Schulte

The thirty-third Annual Meeting of the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) was held in Memphis, Tennessee in May 1929. Among the Technical Committees making presentations at that meeting was the Committee on Safety to Life. The following is an excerpt of part of the discussion which took place following the formal presentation by the Committee Secretary, Robert Moulton:

*“Mr. Moulton: The committee is attempting to do what is perhaps an almost impossible job, but we are working along the lines of our judgment and are trying to do the best we can with what is inherently a very difficult subject to treat,— that is, **what people in a building will do in case of fire**. If we could put a thousand people in a building, as Sidney Williams said in presenting a previous report of this committee, with two stairways 38 inches wide, and start a fire in the basement and see how many people got out alive, and then build another building and make the stairways 42 inches wide and see what happened in a similar fire, we would have positive knowledge of a character which we do not have and cannot have in preparing a report of this kind. **Our work is necessarily based on judgment, on the experience with fires that have taken place. We have obtained all the information available about the major fire disasters, and what we have done has been based on that background of fire experience and judgment.***

I am frank to say that I do not feel that we have gotten the last word on the subject of life safety by any means. We hope that as time goes on we will be able to improve our report. So please receive it in the light of something that we all recognize is not finished or perfect. We want your constructive suggestions. The committee will be very glad to have all the help it can get in the further development of this subject.”

Of course, we can't conduct life safety experiments in actual buildings using humans as guinea pigs, hence, much of our knowledge of building fire safety design is based upon our experience and judgement passed on through the years. It's quite interesting how much of what we see in building codes today originated in early decades of the 1900's.

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Source: "*Proceedings of the Thirty-third Annual [NFPA] Meeting*", Memphis, Tennessee, 1929.