

PSYCHOLOGY

Panic Prevention

Psychological precautions, as well as fireproofing, needed to avoid disaster due to panic in night clubs and other public places. Special problem in war time.

► COMMUNITIES tightening up on night clubs to avoid repetitions of the Boston and St. Johns fires and panics, need to consider psychological preparations as well as fireproofing.

Men and women may be killed in panics even when the actual danger of fire is small. But, if panic can be avoided, they can be gotten out of a crowded hall even though the danger is serious.

Here are some of the mental conditions likely to produce panic, as outlined by Dr. Edwin R. Guthrie, psychologist of the University of Washington, who has been working on Government problems in Washington, D. C.

1. When excited, men and women want to do something and do it immediately—in a hurry.

2. If they do not know what they should do and have formed no habits, as through fire drills, to govern what they will do, they are most likely to follow the crowd—take their signal from what they see other people doing. If many are pushing toward one exit, others will join the jam even though it is futile.

3. When excited, it is impossible to think clearly. In such circumstances, men and women are likely to act from habit. They use the door by which they came in or by which they usually go out. They do not look around for another means of getting out.

4. There are some states of mind in which men and women are more likely to panic—to become wildly excited or frightened by small causes. Anything which makes men jumpy, or peculiarly sensitive to small noises or other possibly frightening things, will make them panic-ripe. These are fatigue, anxiety, alcohol, hangovers, lack of sufficient vitamin B. A crowd in such an anxious or jittery state of mind might panic at the sight of a mouse. Exhausted soldiers have been panicked at the sight of a herd of frightened pigs.

Special precautions should be taken against panics in public places during wartime, because war is likely to develop the state of mind conducive of panic. In case of air raid, precaution against

panic might be just as important for avoiding casualties as precaution against bomb hits.

Here are some of the measures that might be taken:

1. Provide more than one exit. Have them clearly marked and ready for use. Call attention to them by cards on tables, by announcements from the floor, by lights. Induce customers to form habits of leaving by the various exits—do not reserve these exclusively for use in case of fire. In the Boston night club, all the guests had entered by one door and were used to leaving by that same exit. Some of the performers, who were in the habit of using other exits, were led out safely.

2. Appoint "wardens" from among the personnel of the establishment, and drill them in what to do in case of emergency. Have them wear some armband or other sign of authority. Teach each of them to direct people in a certain part of the place to a certain exit. Most people have formed the habit of responding to commands given by someone in authority, provided the command is given in such a way that they can hear it and pay attention to it.

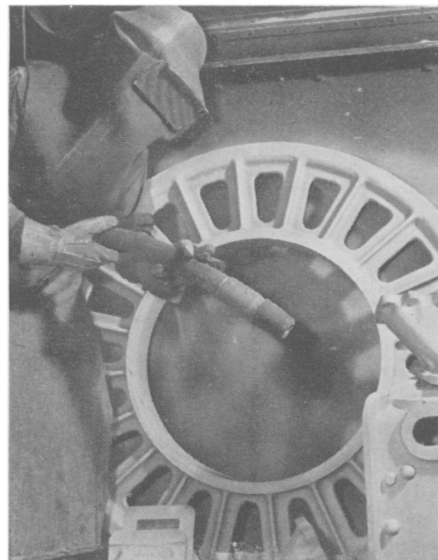
People in a panicky crowd are not carried away or governed by some mysterious "mob mind," Dr. Guthrie emphasized. "Frightened individuals in a crowd act just the way they might be expected to act under the circumstances," he said. "The trouble is that the crowd in a panic has not been prepared by previous training for this particular situation, and so they do what their previous training has taught them to do, which is to follow the example of others—to do what they see others do."

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CHEMISTRY

Movie Films To Be Worn In Form of Raincoats

► THOUSANDS OF MILES of movie film will soon be worn by Americans in the guise of raincoats and other pyroxylin-coated fabrics, because of a recent WPB restriction on the use of vinyl



SANDBLASTING—In the war-important aluminum workers like this one sandblast the metal. Notice the peculiar safety clothing worn. This is an official Office of War Information photograph.

resin and pyroxylin for civilian products, reports Wells Martin, head commercial specialist in the Protective Coating Section of the WPB Chemical Branch.

Rubber in civilian fabrics was replaced by vinyl resin synthetics. When this became a critical war material, production again shifted, this time to pyroxylin-coated fabrics, a nitro-cellulose product. But as America goes into action on an increasingly wide front, more nitro-cellulose is needed to make explosives and civilian use of prime nitro-cellulose has been cut by half.

All movie film scrap is now available, however, to fill the gap. Old movies, cuttings, retakes—all are being reclaimed, for chemically it is the same nitro-cellulose, a compound of cotton and nitric acid.

Under present conditions, WPB officials expect that film scrap will be sufficient to tide us over.

Later it will be necessary for the ingenuity of laboratory workers to produce other substitutes. Practically every laboratory in this field is now working on the problem, it is reported. An oil combined with some resin will probably be next in the parade of products for waterproof garments, coated fabric, paper, cardboard and similar uses.

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