

# NEW SHIP SAFETY TRACED TO '34 FIRE

## Lessons From Morro Castle Disaster Put Into Rules

By WERNER BAMBERGER

The night of Sept. 8, 1934, is still the night to remember as far as the Coast Guard is concerned.

That was the night the Ward Line luxury liner Morro Castle caught fire off Ashbury Park, N. J. One hundred twenty-five of her 549 passengers and crew perished.

The disaster, a turning point in protective naval architecture, led to reforms and new regulations for vessel construction and operation. The Coast Guard declared last week that American merchant vessels had since become the safest in the world.

The Morro Castle fire prompted a Senate investigation and the still famous Senate Report 184, considered by many a landmark in ship safety.

### Lessons Fire Taught

Ten principal lessons learned from the fire aboard the 508-foot, twin-funneled liner have since been incorporated in United States merchant marine safety regulations.

They were:

1. Interior bulkheads (walls) should be of a fire-retardant nature.
2. Doors to compartments should be self-closing.
3. Automatic fire alarms should be installed throughout a vessel.
4. Fire doors should be capable of being closed by remote control.
5. Stair cases should be totally enclosed and fitted with self-closing doors.
6. Self-closing, smoke-stop doors should divide all long corridors.
7. Emergency generators should be carried aboard.
8. Crews should be trained in fire fighting.
9. What to do in case of fire should be spelled out clearly for passengers and crew.
10. All escape routes should be clearly indicated.

Another result of the Morro Castle fire was the appointment of a special technical staff in the Bureau of Marine Inspection of the Department of Commerce to review and supervise the construction and operation of vessels. The bureau has since been incorporated into the Coast Guard, which today has assigned one fifth of its total officer personnel to duties connected with merchant marine safety.

### Some Safety Measures

Some of the specific fire-protection regulations now in effect outlaw the use of wood in vessels larger than 100 gross tons; provide for the use of special fire-retardant panels; call for an adequate number of fire escapes from the lowest levels of the ship to the boat deck and provide for draft stops and other means to insure the strict and effective zoning of a ship's ventilation system.

Passenger areas must be separated by steel structures from cargo and machinery spaces, and the amount of combustible materials aboard must be strictly controlled.

A Coast Guard spokesman gave an example last week of the new safety standards. "If we find a ship with an excessive number of layers of paint on her bulkheads," he said, "we make them scrape it off and paint it over just once."

**The New York Times**

Published: September 13, 1964

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