

Boston Releases Final Report On 2007 Restaurant Fire

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In February, 2008, the Boston Fire Department's Board of Inquiry issued its final report on the fatal fire at the Tai Ho Restaurant in August of 2007. During the fire, two fire fighters lost their lives and the restaurant was gutted. This was the first loss of life for the department since 1994.

The restaurant was occupied during the hour that the fire is estimated to have burned in the duct work. The alarm system didn't go off until after an employee called in the fire to officials at 9:04 pm. At 9:20, the fire department ordered everyone off the roof. At 9:26, they ordered the evacuation of the entire building.

Before the fire, the kitchen exhaust system had been serviced by a company who left their inspection certificate, which indicated little more than that the system had been cleaned on what appears to have been May 18, 2007. The company, J&B Cleaning, was paid \$500 for the work and submitted the receipt to the city upon request.

The system, as we now know, had not been cleaned. Not thoroughly and certainly not frequently, based on the volume of grease build up. In fact, the responding fire fighters and investigators found a pan on a stove to catch the grease that was dripping down from the duct work.

Neither had the system been properly inspected. A 1" x 12" gap had developed in the duct work, which contributed to the rapid expansion of the fire through the duct work and into the walls and roof. It also meant that the fire alarm did not immediately activate.

According to the city's report, these two factors were the main causes of the fire.

The IKECA Board of Directors unanimously approved a donation, on behalf of the IKECA Membership, to the fund established for the firefighters' families.

This incident is a lesson. Not only for the City of Boston and those restaurants who chose to ignore the simple fact that fuel and an ignition source create a fire; but also for IKECA members. This incident was preventable, and IKECA members work every day to prevent this from ever happening again.

As a result of this, the City of Boston has enacted legislation requiring all commercial kitchen exhaust cleaners be certified and meet licensing requirements. While the devil remains in the details, we are hopeful that this move by the City Council will prevent any more tragedies like the one at Tai Ho.

The full Board of Inquiry report can be found at:
www.cityofboston.gov/fire/pdfs/BOI_Report.pdf

"The occupants sitting in the restaurant did not know that there was a fire burning overhead above the double ceiling. The restaurant workers in the kitchen didn't know the fire was burning...It wasn't until a portion of the fire dropped down into the kitchen that they found out that there was a fire and quickly evacuated, calling for 911."

Kevin MacCurtain, Boston Fire Department Chief

