Before the Next Fire

Trace the causes of a disaster to weigh safety reforms.

IS.1.37 "Formulate and present a position or course of action on an issue by examining the underlying factors contributing to that issue."

NAME _____ DATE _____

1 READ AND MARK

Read it twice

YOUR JOB Underline three conditions that made the Triangle fire deadly. Circle two reasons those conditions remained, then number the factors you think lawmakers should address first and second.

The Triangle Fire and the Case for Reform

1 On March 25, 1911, a fire broke out at the Triangle Waist Company in New York City. The factory made women's blouses on the upper floors of a building. Flames spread quickly through piles of fabric scraps, and the factory had no sprinkler system. Workers crowded toward stairways as smoke filled the rooms. Some doors leading to exits were locked, and an outside fire escape collapsed. Firefighters' ladders could not reach the highest floors. In less than half an hour, 146 people died, most of them young immigrant women. The disaster exposed several failures, not one single mistake.

2 Why had those risks lasted? Factory owners wanted to prevent theft and keep production moving, but locking an exit put workers in danger. Workers had little power to challenge unsafe conditions without risking their wages. Many garment workers had joined a major strike in 1909 to demand better pay and conditions, yet dangerous factories remained. New York had safety rules, but rules alone could not guarantee safe workplaces without effective inspections and enforcement. The fire therefore raised a question for lawmakers: should they focus on owners' practices, government oversight, or workers' ability to report hazards?

3 After the fire, public anger helped drive an investigation of factory conditions across New York. A state commission examined workplaces and recommended changes. Lawmakers passed new safety measures, including stronger rules for fire exits and sprinklers. Still, any proposal had to address how hazards could be found before another fire. An exit rule could fail if doors were locked during a shift; an inspection program could fail if visits were too rare. A worker complaint system could help reveal hidden dangers, but workers might stay silent if they feared losing their jobs. Effective action meant matching a solution to each cause.

2 ANSWER WITH EVIDENCE

Use the passage

1. A lawmaker wants to require sprinklers first. Which cause supports that choice, and which cause would sprinklers leave unresolved?

2. What action would address locked exits? Explain why passing a rule alone might not be enough.

3. An owner suggests relying only on workers to report hazards. Why might that plan fail, and what could lawmakers add?

4. A proposal funds taller fire ladders but changes nothing inside factories. Take a position on the proposal using two causes from the passage.

3 YOUR TURN

Your own words

Write a short statement to the 1911 state commission recommending a two-step safety plan. Address one hazard inside the factory and one reason hazards remained, explain how each step responds to its cause, and identify one weakness your plan must overcome.

Before the Next Fire

PART 1 · READ AND MARK

Underline three conditions that made the Triangle fire deadly. Circle two reasons those conditions remained, then number the factors you think lawmakers should address first and second. Accept any marking that follows this job and points at the right text.

PART 2 · ANSWERS

#	QUESTION	ANSWER
1	A lawmaker wants to require sprinklers first. Which cause supports that choice, and which cause would sprinklers leave unresolved?	**The factory had no sprinklers, which could have slowed the fire. Sprinklers would not have unlocked exit doors.**
2	What action would address locked exits? Explain why passing a rule alone might not be enough.	**Require exits to stay unlocked during shifts and check compliance. Without effective inspections, owners might still lock doors.**
3	An owner suggests relying only on workers to report hazards. Why might that plan fail, and what could lawmakers add?	**Workers might stay silent because they fear losing their jobs or wages. Lawmakers could add regular inspections.**
4	A proposal funds taller fire ladders but changes nothing inside factories. Take a position on the proposal using two causes from the passage.	**Taller ladders might help firefighters reach upper floors, but the plan is insufficient. It would not address fabric scraps that helped flames spread or locked exits that trapped workers.**

PART 3 · YOUR TURN (SAMPLE ANSWER)

The state should require sprinklers in garment factories and inspect them regularly. Fabric scraps helped the Triangle fire spread, and sprinklers could slow a fire while workers escape. Inspections matter because safety rules did not always keep factories safe, and workers risked their wages by challenging owners. My plan could fail if inspections are too rare to catch missing or broken equipment. The state must provide enough inspectors to check factories often.

Accept other defensible priorities when students connect each proposed action to a cause in the passage. For Part 3, look for a factory hazard, a reason it persisted, a matching action for each, and a realistic limitation.