

Ozone Disco Tragedy – Could've Been Prevented?

An Analysis on its Structure

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Abstract

This case study looks into the structure of the Ozone Disco Club being the culprit of killing many people on March 18, 1996 at Timog Ave. corner Tomas Morato. It accounted resources from different media (e.g. newspaper, video, etc.) to analyse the reason as to why the fire accident that happened on Ozone Disco became cataclysmic. It scrutinize the structure of the Ozone Disco itself as well as the negligence of the government officials, the City engineering office in particular; with regards to their job to check if a structure pass the standards that the Building Code had set. After the fire had bet put out on the Ozone Disco, certain evidences led to finding out how and why the fire started. The owners of the club, as well as the officials of government were investigated upon the incident and were sentenced years later. It was able to study the given matter from the articles and statements of survivors. Furthermore, it gave recommendations in order for the Ozone fire Tragedy to be the first and last of its kind;

Introduction

Night Life in various cities became alive when nightclubs made its way to entertainment business in the 20's but celebrated its golden years in the 70's when it transitioned its name to "Disco" – popular music and dance at that time. These disco clubs started to rise up in America, wherein major US cities are thriving for disco club scenes. It's a place for people to gather and enjoy the night dancing while Disk Jockeys (DJs) would play disco hits and mixing them all up using turntables scratching to energize the club's patrons. To gather as much people in their disco clubs, some uses strove lights, laser lights, and smoke machines – to electrify the partygoers as well.

Being a crowd-pleasing social interaction, disco clubs engulfs the scenery of nights in major cities all over the world. Of course, it made its way on the nightlife of Filipinos at that year as well. It becomes a hit for people seeking for a hangout destination for partying, dancing and etc. which is livened up by teenagers at that era. Filipinos being socially active people loved the idea of gathering in one place and enjoying the night with friends while mixed music's are playing on the background. Patrons comes from different ages – whether you're an old partylover or a young lad, still you'll be hook up by the club scenes.

Amidst from the great image that disco clubs had projected, a dark side of it continually shows. Indeed it's a good place to gather but when tragedy happens, laughter and enjoyment will turned to mourning and grievance. This is what happened on the last night of one well-known disco club in the Philippines particularly in the Quezon City – Ozone Disco. It is where the most tragic fire incident involving clubs happen in the country claiming a 162 death toll and authorities are all pointing their fingers on the structure of the club being the cause of the

accident. Moreover, these people died in a horrifying manner – being burned alive and stacked up to each other.

Background of the Study

The Ozone Disco Fire Tragedy was considered the worst fire happened in the Philippines in terms of casualties waving a death toll of 162 – mostly teenager ages 15-20's. The nightclub, Ozone became popular in the Philippines in the 90's. It serves as a hangout place for party seekers and lovers. Considering the fact that the tragedy happened on the month of March – a month when school days end and summer kicks out; many teenagers look for place to enjoy even just for a night to reciprocate their hard work and sleepless nights allotted for studying. To hook up these costumers, the management decided to let the entrance fee of the disco club be free of any charge – enticing young lads of the city.

Although the Ozone Disco lacks fire preventing equipment's and structures, still, it managed to operate due to the corrupt officials of the Quezon City Engineering Office who permitted them to (Belmonte, 1996). Moreover, it's already a fact that Ozone Disco is on the classification of being a nightclub. In the history of fire incidents, nightclub fires are one of the dangerous cases of fires; probably the worst one's. But what are the reason behind its fiery image; to kill as much people it gathers? This is where the concept of structure enters. Nightclubs, in terms of its structure, are the best location for a deadly fire to blaze out. Why? It's all because, almost all the nightclubs have this common trait – being a “firetrap” establishment. Most of these clubs have a room for dancing while the DJ in the DJ Booth electrifies the night by playing some funky and mixed music. This room will then be occupied by its patrons and when a fire broke out, the lives of these people would be at risk. Another thing that clubs won't never miss to include is their Disk Jockey – the man behind the energetic performance of its patrons. Of course, where there is a DJ, there is a DJ Station/Booth; and whenever there are Stations/Booths, wiring would never be absent. In the history of wiring system, that of the DJ

Booths are the worst. In that place wires of speakers, and other electronic equipment are just in the open space or they are not properly arranged. This became a big problem in the case of the Ozone Disco Fire as well.

The focus of this case study is to cater the structural basis/grounds on why the cataclysmic Ozone Disco happened. It also tells the story behind the Ozone, jotting down the important notes on why; in so many place in Quezon City, the fire move its way to the deadliest fire in the world. In fact, according to the National Fire Protection Association (NFPA), the Ozone disco ranked 6th in the list of deadliest nightclub fires in world history with the Coconut Grove Nightclub Tragedy being the first – located at Boston, Massachusetts; wherein 492 people died (Philippine Daily Inquirer, 2013).

Significance of the Study

Fires are indeed destructive in nature, that's why there's a saying that it's better to catch your house on flood than in a fire. First is that, fire engulfs and turn everything in its path into ashes without any ado; not like in floods wherein your furniture will be wet only but not exterminated.

The significance of this study canters on that idea between structures and fires. A good structure with an architectural design that is well-planned, would never turn into a disastrous one. On the other hand if structures were built with laxity, these could be a major problem whenever fires come to the scene. Experts says that the answers on why Ozone Disco Fire turned into a hell like accident could be found on its structure – which was built with little planning only. In order to hinder businessmen from starting a business just to get profit without first analysing the location as well as its proneness to disasters especially fires, Philippines added to the constitution its National Building Code under the Presidential Decree 1096. This sets standards on establishments and buildings. Local Government has its localized version of this as well.

The structure of the Ozone Disco became a living proof on how structures could save lives from disasters like fire. This study had been clear and concise on its focus to let the people became aware, especially those who wants to start their own establishment. It is absolute that no wise businessmen would love to watch his/her structure as it burned down by fire. Great amount of money is at risk if this will happen. Aside from the fact that it could harm people as well. It is a loss for the owners of establishments and to that of costumers as well. People will now learn the importance of how a building was made to its best –its structure and design could be of good help to others when time comes. It'll be better for prevention of Fires in such structures to lose some money to buy for firefighting equipment rather than lives of people are to be lost.

Scope and Limitation

This case study was conducted to relate the structure of Ozone Disco and to the tragedy that it had brought. The story behind the construction of Ozone Disco Club as well as its history was discussed. The focal point of this study revolves on the club's tragic disaster – The Ozone Tragedy. It accounts statements from people that played a vital role in the said incident that claimed a 162-deatch toll. Based on the gathered accounts of survivors, the story of the disco fire was determined.

News articles, local and foreign, were used to come up with this study. Through the use of current technology, old newspaper that reported the said event were also used. Video clips as well as local documentaries were utilized to further improve the details (e.g. time, date, people and etc.) that is presented in this case study. It limits its resources from 1996 – the day the fire broke out, up until 2013.

Discussions

I. The Rise of the Ozone Disco

i. Story behind the Structure

Ozone Disco ranks among the most prestigious and well-known nightclubs in the Philippines in the early 90's as it becomes a great hit for teenagers at that era where music from countries especially from America becomes popular – disco hits, pop rock and a mix of other funky music. The location of the establishment reckon up the popularity of the sought after nightclub – being in the Quezon City, the most populous, largest and richest country in the Philippines. It is located near the Boy Scout Memorial Rotonda at Timog Avenue. Corner Tomas Morato, Quezon City. The disco club occupied the building that was once housed the famous “Birdland” – a jazz club originated in New York City that caters music of jazz singers from all over the world, yet closed due to people’s lack of interest in that genre of music at that time.



Figure 1.0: Birdland – famous jazz club in the 80's

Source: photographersdirect.com

The ozone disco club started its operation on the year 1991 through the efforts of Sergio Orgaooow – the former owner of Birdland. The owner decided to sell the land as well as the building itself to a businessman named Hermilo Ocampo – the president of Westwood Entertainment Company Incorporated. The Ozone Disco was originally allowed to be built as a residential house for the Ocampo family, however, being an entrepreneur who wants to gain profit from what he bought; Hermilo Ocampo decided to renovate the said building and turn it into a nightclub. He then seek for investors in order to build a disco club in the abandoned building. With his and her wife’s money as well as the capitals gained from investors which were Alfredo Chua, Rosita Ku, and her son Sonny Ku – the plan to build the Ozone Disco started. The said people became the stockholders/directors of the Ozone Disco.

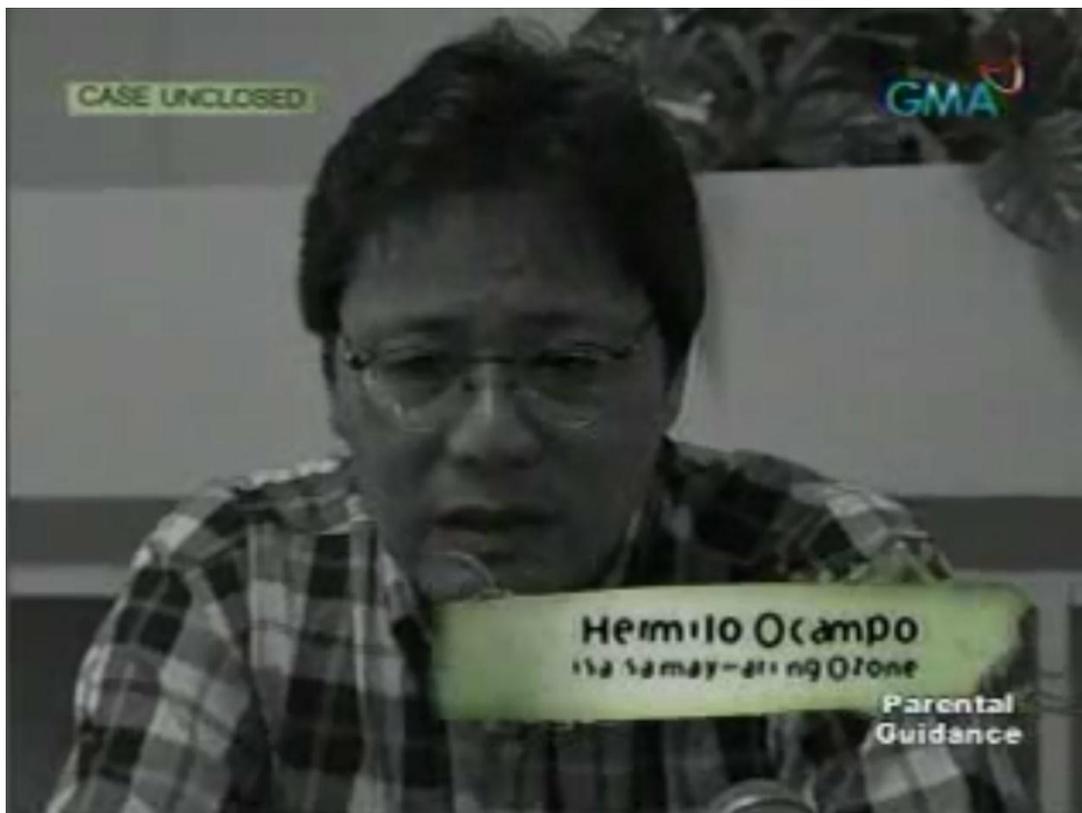


Figure 1. 1: Hermilo Ocampo, president of the Westwood Entertainment Company Inc., in an interview regarding the Ozone Tragedy in 1996

Source: GMA News – Case Unclosed

The permit that the company holds is the permit of the Birdland Jazz club that is temporary in nature and could be withdrawn if the changes that the inspector wanted made for greater fire safety were not done (Paredes, 1996). Also, as declared in the permit, the maximum number of people that was approved to use the structure was 35 only (Vanzi, 2001). Given these circumstances, still the Westwood pushed on its want to renovate the building immediately after receiving a permit from the City Engineering Office of Quezon City without any inspection happened. Ozone Disco was then handled by Westwood Entertainment Company Inc. – the company that the Ocampo’s established. The said company then manage to make a name in the nightclub industry after Ozone Disco became a hit for being the top nightclub in the Quezon City. It became popular to teenagers because the club had a wide variety of food and drinks offered in affordable prices aside from being the hangout place for elites of the city. “*Ang Ozone Disco... ay isa sa mga pinakasikat na gimikan ng aming panahon.*” (Quitiquit, 2011). Added to that, it offers 50% discounts on all fees (including entrance fee, foods and drinks) every Monday and Saturdays – with this it became a hit for party-goers (Ces Oreña-Drilon, 2010).



Figure 1. 2: The signage of Ozone – a disco club popular in 90’s

Source: ABS-CBN News – I Survived



Figure 1. 3: Patrons of Ozone dancing to the tune of live music and under the strobe lights of the club.

Source: ABS-CBN News – I Survived

ii. Construction of Ozone Disco

The building which was once home to “Birdland” is in good condition when the management of Ocampo bought it from Orgaow. The lot size of it is 50 square meters – a size of a standard apartment enough for two bedrooms, kitchen and a bathroom. Even though the size of the lot is too small for a disco club to be stationed, still, the company pushed for its construction. The company expedite the construction of the disco club in order to start its business as soon as possible.

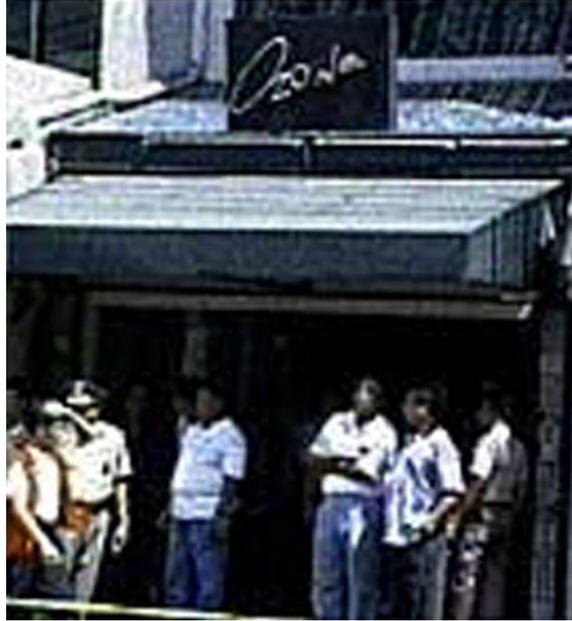


Figure 1. 4: The front of Ozone Disco, seen here are patrons waiting outside the club

Source: hauntedfilipinostories.blogspot.com

The construction of the ozone disco became a success in the part of the Westwood Entertainment Company Incorporated. The Signage of Ozone Disco at the top of its doors entice people as well as cars that passes by Timog Avenue coming from Epifanio de los Santos Avenue (EDSA), to come inside and enjoy the service they are offering. The doorway of the Ozone Disco are built to be in swing, opened by pushing the doors only. It is located in the middle of a money changer (in its left) and a restaurant (in its right). Once inside the disco club, a DJ Booth could be easily seen, in front of it was the dance floor. Beside the DJ booth was the store room – serves as storage for technical equipment and others. Of course, there were tables and chairs as well where its patrons could sit and socialize with other people. The management of Ozone Disco also decided to build a mezzanine - an intermediate floor between main floors of a building or an elevated floor inside a structure that shares the same ceiling with the floor beneath it; in order to maximize space and serves as a platform that offers a higher view for its

customers. Added to that, it has strove lights decorative wall designs and foam installations in the DJ booth area. It was indeed celebrating its prosperous year before a tragedy happen; it tops among other nightclubs in the Philippines amid its small capacity area.



Figure 1. 5: Draft of the Ozone Disco Floor Plan

Source: The Author of the Case Study

II. Downfall of the Ozone

i. Ozone’s Last Night

It was a fine and typical Monday night for patrons of Ozone Disco – 18th of March, 1996. Normally, at Mondays, entrance fee were discounted by 50% but at that special night, the management of the Ozone disco decided to give the entrance fee as free to all its patrons,

considering the fact that it is the month wherein graduating students celebrate the end of their career as students and now work for their families and reach for their dreams (Ces Oreña-Drilon, 2010). Upon hearing that everyone is free to enter Ozone disco, many flock to the club to party. Moreover, as the Ozone was expecting for a huge number customers to go into the club that night; new lights were put in, partitions made and what was then a capacity of seven tables or 35 persons was apparently expanded. A mezzanine was put in and the floor space was expanded. All of these were done without any permits coming out of City Hall or any inspections made (Paredes, 1996).

Recalling the number of people to be in the Ozone disco, as per the permit to operate stated, it had been approved to be of use to only 35 people as its maximum. Yet, the logbook of the club reported that almost 350 customers, aside from its 40 employees was inside of Ozone disco at that night; therefore nullifying the rules to operate under its permit (Vanzi, 2001).

The atmosphere in the Ozone disco was very warming at that time defeating the coldness of the night. Rhen Galang, one of the survivors; said that at that night the disco was full of people that's why their group only managed to have a table near the door (Ces Oreña-Drilon, 2010). Indeed, Ozone was jam packed at that night; unfortunately, something happened that extend the popularity of Ozone from being one of the famous nightclubs to the dangerous disco to be – it is where the worst fire incident happened in the Philippines.

ii. Ozone Disco in Inferno

At around 11:35 p.m., there was a mere flicker of light appeared at disc jockey Mervyn Reyes's feet. Some customers noticed that yet they thought that it was just a gimmick of the club that's why no one panicked at that time. Alexander Taguibao, who happened to watched the

flash as it happened in the DJ's Booth assumed that it was part of the club's light show and strobes and twirling spots (Lopez, 2012). But after a few instants, one of the lightings in the ceiling sparked; thinking that it was just another special effects or a part of the show, the crowd in the dance floor of the club continued on partying. Rhen, another survivor, said that he noticed that after the explosion of that lighting, he noticed that a fire was lit. He said that one of the DJs in the Booth announced not to panic. Smoke started to come out and the air became filled with burning smell yet they again thought that it was just coming from a smoke machine – just another gimmick of the club. But after a few minutes, two consecutive explosions were heard inside the club (Ces Oreña-Drilon, 2010). Right after the explosions, while commotions started to immense, a girl from the crowd shouted, "Fire!" (Lopez, 2012). Rhen said he saw that the DJ was the first one to ran away from the booth, however in an interview; Marvin Reyes, the DJ at that night said, "I tried to announce there was a fire, but the microphone stopped working." (The Independent (UK), 1996). Within seconds the whole ceiling burst on fire and the ceiling crashed onto the floor. The light fixtures as well as the whole mezzanine tumbled down, crushing many people underneath it – killing them all (Quitiquit, 2011). Lights went out right after the explosion, making the disco dark yet lightened by the fire.

Ozone's patrons panicked and rushed their way through the only exit known; the narrow door – an inswing type one. The fire blazed its way through the ceiling, to the windows and into the floors burning all people on its way. Because the people in the disco feared of whatever may happen to them, they pushed their way against each other just to escape from the burning establishment. "We saw smoke and tried to run outside, but were caught in a stampede," Rose said – one of the survivors (New York Times, 1996). When the Firefighters arrived at 12:05 a.m., a full half hour after the blaze started, fought the fire for 52 minutes. (Lopez, 2012). The

Fire lasted for an hour and then piles of dead charred body welcomed them when they entered the Ozone Disco.



Figure 1.6: Dead burned bodies stuck up with each other inside the Ozone Disco

Source: www.travelcreepster.com



Figure 1.7: A pile of charred bodies of victims of the Ozone Tragedy found in the middle of the club

Source: ABS-CBN News – I Survived

iii. The Fire and Ozone Disco's Structure

Fire could be the worst accident that could happen in a structure yet it could be prevented. Even before the Ozone Disco rose from the night club scenes, its operation should've ceased already for reasons such as:

a. Birdland Jazz Club – the establishment that were once located in the building where Ozone Disco rose, was only given a temporary permit to operate and that the Quezon City Hall warned them that the said permit would be withdrawn if the changes that the inspector want made were not done (Paredes, 1996).

b. The temporary permit approved the establishment for use by only 35 people (Vanzi, 2001).

c. Ozone was originally allowed to be build a residential house not a commercial establishment.

d. It was never given permit (not temporary) to operate a disco club business.

e. The building where the Ozone Disco located is too small for a Disco Club – only 50 square meters (excluding the neighbouring restaurant).

Amidst these reasons, the Westwood Entertainment Company Inc. headed by Hermilo Ocampo managed to operate its business – Ozone Disco. Some speculates that the reason why even without solid permit to run such business, Ozone still managed to run. Feliciano Belmonte, Jr., former congressman of Quezon City; blamed the “Bureaucratic Bungling” – under the table operations of officials in the City Engineering Office. He said, that the structure pursue its

operation, “with the help of some corrupt City Hall officials” (Lopez, 2012). In terms of structure, the Ozone Disco didn’t really pass the standards of the building code of the Quezon City as well as to that of the Philippines.

Under the Building Code and the Fire Protection Code and the regulations of the Quezon City government, places like restaurants and discos should have:

- a. Maximum Occupancy Levels,
- b. Fire Exits,
- c. Working Fire Extinguishers,
- d. Proper Electrical Wiring
- e. and such other things that would help keep its customers out of harm's way. (Paredes, 1996)

Unfortunately, Ozone didn’t have any of these. A frequent patron of the Ozone Disco, Feroma Kaylie, but not there on the time of the tragedy; attested to the fact that the club didn’t have any fire exits. Yet the owner of the Disco Club, Hermino Ocampo insisted that there is one fire exit in the said establishment. "Because of the thick smoke, the whole place became dark and people panicked. So the fire exit wasn't used." (Ocampo, 1996). Sources found out that the Fire Exit/ Emergency Door that the owner was telling was inside the VIP room and led into the kitchen of an adjoining restaurant. Some disco employees used it to escape (Lopez, 2012). Fire Inspector, Warlito Daus, said that the fire exit he was telling was not proper one. Some even said that the fire exit was closed by the neighbouring restaurant when the fire started letting inly the employees to get out. Aside from that, the club didn’t have any fire sprinklers as well, to cease out the fire immediately when it happened. The fire extinguishers that the company provided for the club was as all defective. This were as well another reason behind its destruction, because if

the establishment had working fire extinguisher, even just one; the staff of the Ozone Disco could've taken the initiative to put out the fire (Ron, 2012).

But what really caused the fire? There are certain factors that intensified the fire inside the club and all survivors as well as the firemen pointed out at one thing – its interior structure. Almost all things you can see inside the club are combustible or easily to be caught on fire– from fixtures, furniture, ceiling and even on its walls. The list of all these combustible materials are as follows:

- a. The DJ Booth where it all started had acoustic foam installation and decorations.
- b. The Disco Club had cheap foam installation all over its walls.
- c. The ceiling of the club was made from cartons where Filipinos usually placed their eggs (e.g chicken) (Quitiquit, 2011).

But probably the main reason why number of people died reached 162, is its doors. The door of the club didn't follow the standard requirement that any establishment must follow – it is to provide a swing – in and out door; a door that could be opened by pushing, as well as pulling the handles. However all the doors of the establishment established the one that leads to the dance floor of the club was an in-swing type; accessible only by pulling the door inward. With this type of door, people that will push the door from inside will never have to open the door in any way they can unless they managed to pull it inward. That is what happened when the people rushed their way through the door of Ozone. Because they are in panic of getting out of the establishment, they tried their best to outrun others. This caused a big pile of people in front of the door, making it harder to be opened because the crowd blocked the entrance. And even people escaped the first door, the door leading to the exit couldn't be opened as well. It was

because the security guards locked them from the outside, thinking that a riot was taking place inside the said club (Vanzi, 2001).

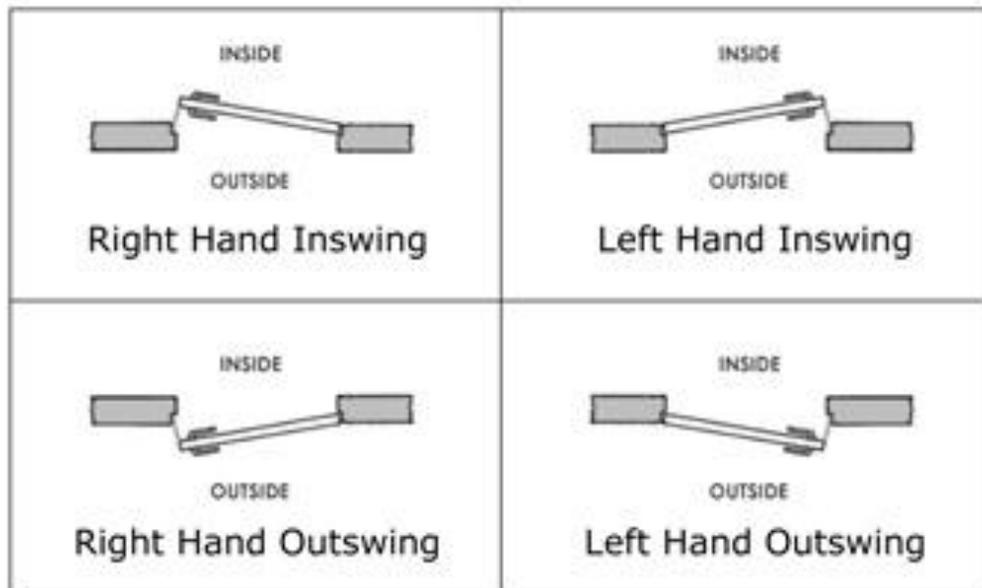


Figure 1.8: Different Types of Swing Doors; the Right Hand Swing (upper left) and the Left Hand Swing (upper right) was used as doors in Ozone Disco

Source: www.curtislumber.com



Figure 1.9: A woman opening thin-swing type of doors that was left on the Ozone Tragedy

Source: ABS-CBN News – I Survived

The list of its structure problems didn't end in its interior design, it goes out as well. When the fire broke, Fire fighters find it difficult to stop the fire because the establishment lacked fire hydrant. They ran out of water, so time was consumed just to find a fire hydrant so that the fire truck could refill (Ron, 2012). After two hours, the fire had been entirely ceased out said Fire officer Moises Marcelo (The Independent (UK), 1996).



Figure 2.0: People including relatives of the victims of the Ozone Fire gathered outside the club as they firefighters retrieved the burned bodies.

Source: ABS-CBN News – I Survived

iv. Aftermath of the Ozone Fire

Subsequently, when the fire was entirely put out, fire fighters were enabled to get inside the establishment. "In my 31 years [in the service], I have never seen a tragedy like this," (Santos, 1996). Edgardo de los Santos, the first fire fighter that opened the doors of the Ozone

disco described that he saw an estimated of 40 burnt bodies in front of the door but when he managed to see it clearer, he was shocked upon knowing that there were 3 to 4 stacks of burnt bodies (Adolfo, 2008). Him and his fellow fire fighters started to retrieve these dead bodies inside the club – almost all the victims are unidentifiable, making the identification harder. Corpses were stuck with each due to burning, making the retrieval of bodies difficult.

Families of the victims of the Ozone Tragedy waited outside the club, mourning and devastated to what happened to their loved ones. Survivors that were injured and, burned but still alive were sent to the nearest hospital, many of them with third-degree burns; some were even transferred to facilities distance away because of lack of space. On the other hand, the bodies were delivered into the morgues; there, families of victims started their search for their loved ones from scratch because some of the bodies retrieved couldn't be recognized.

The death toll of the ozone Tragedy hits 162 while 95 of the survivors were injured and severely burned. Aside from the death of its patrons, the company that manage the Ozone Disco lose a great amount of money from the fire that raze the club.



Figure 2. 1: Burned human bodies retrieved after the Ozone Fire were undistinguishable.

Source: no-benta.blogspot.com

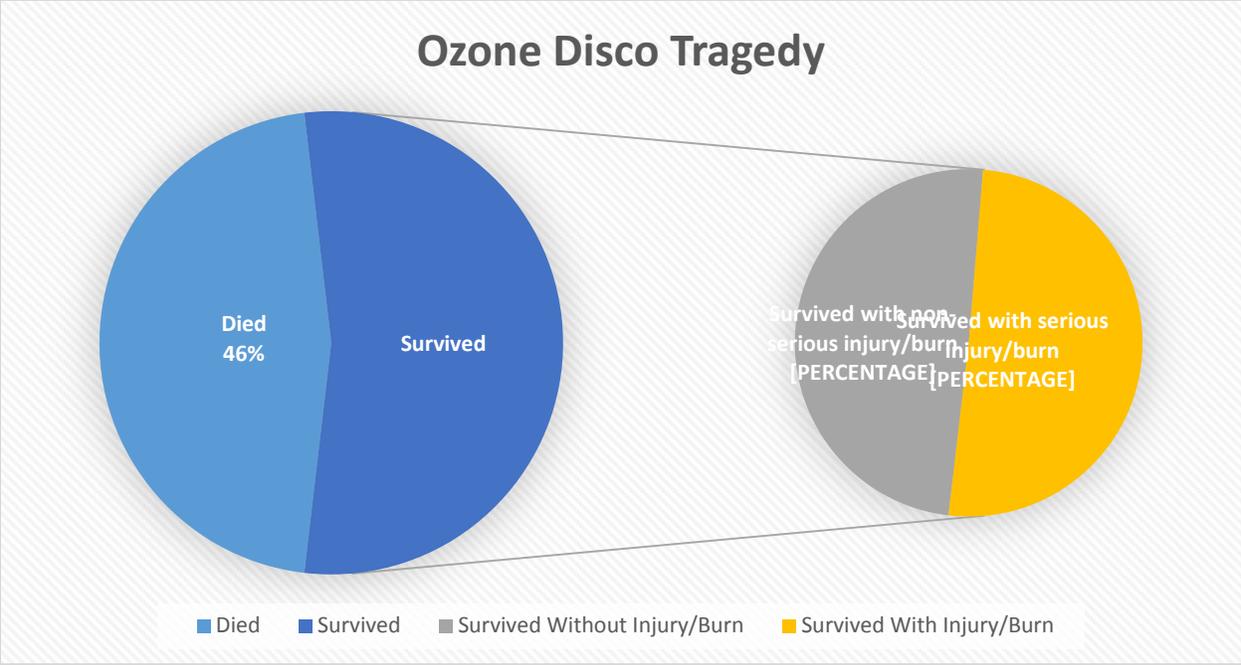


Table 1: The Ozone Disco Tragedy Data (Died and Survived)



Figure 2. 2: Image of the Ozone Disco – the ceiling and other debris are on the floor after the massive fire burned the club down

Source: rappler.com



Figure 2. 3: A father desperately looking for his sons after the tragedy happened, used megaphone; and even offered reward to those who seen them.

Source: ABS-CBN News – I Survived



Figure 2. 4: Two of those who died from the Ozone Fire Tragedy. (Rayville, 14 yrs. old – right) and (Roxanne, 16 yrs. old – left)

Source: ABS-CBN News – I Survived



Figure 2. 5: A man carrying burned bodies of victims of Ozone Fire to be brought outside for identification.

Source: ABS-CBN News – I Survived



Figure 2. 6: A Fire Marshall carefully handle the corpses while people from media took pictures of it.

Source: ABS-CBN News – I Survived



Figure 2. 7: A woman who survived the fire is in great pain having 3rd degree burns across her body.

Source: ABS-CBN News – I Survived



Figure 2. 8: Casted with bandages, the man thankfully survived from the fire however 95% of his body was burned.

Source: ABS-CBN News – I Survived



Figure 2. 9: A dead body is carried in a stretcher headed to the morgue.

Source: GMA News – Case Unclosed



Figure 3.0: Many relatives of the victims rushed into the Ozone Disco upon hearing the news of fire broking out. (Here, you'll see a mother in grievance upon knowing the death of his sons/daughters)

Source: ABS-CBN News – I Survived

III. Justice for the Ozone Tragedy

After the tragic Ozone Disco Tragedy, Justice for the victims was immediately sought after by their relatives and government officials and authorities. President Fidel Ramos ordered an investigation. The next day, March 19, Quezon City fire officials were suspended. City engineer Alfredo Macapugay, whose office is responsible for enforcing building and fire safety regulations, was relieved of his duties (Lopez, 2012).

Judge Ofelia Marquez of Quezon City Regional Trial Court Branch 216, handled the case of Ozone in the year 1996. These were the lists of the verdict of Judge Marquez regarding the Ozone Disco Tragedy:

- 1 {
 - There was no Fire alarms and sprinklers and othe fire preventive equipments
- 2 {
 - approved for only 35 people yet house 350 customers and 40 employees by the night the tragedy happened
- 3 {
 - Only Mr. Ocampo and Ng were sentenced for they're the only ones managing the disco club
- 4 {
 - The door used by the establishment was in-swing door

Table 2: The reasons behind the verdict of Judge Marquez

After 5 years of seeking justice, on March 27, 2001, in a 125 – page decision read in the open court, Hermilo Ocampo and Ramon Ng were convicted of reckless imprudence resulting in multiple homicide and multiple serious injuries. They were president and treasurer, respectively, of Westwood Entertainment, the company that operated Ozone. Moreover, they were required by the court to pay the fine amounting 25 million pesos each.

Ozone Disco Fire (1996)	
Amount of Property Damaged	P 15 million
No. of Injured Persons	350
No. of Injured Dead	162

Table 3. Amount of property damage and; no. of injured and dead people In the Ozone Disco.

Source: Bureau of Fire Protection

Restitution and Fines of the Ozone Fire Tragedy	
Fine	P 25 million each *
Restitution for Injured	P 100,000**
Restitution for Dead	P 150, 000**
* to be paid by Hermilo Ocampo and Ramon Ng ** to be paid by Ocampo’s wife Raquel, Alfredo Chua, Rosita Ku, and her son Sonny Ku	

Table 4: Restitution and Fines of the Ozone Fire Tragedy

Others that were once included in the case were cleared of criminal liability, they were: Ocampo's wife Raquel, Alfredo Chua, Rosita Ku, and her son Sonny Ku. "They were merely stockholders/directors of the firm and had no direct supervision/participation in the day-to-day affairs of the establishment," (Marquez, 2001). However, the said judge ruled that all six share in paying the restitution amounting P150, 000 to the relatives of every one who died and P100, 000 to each of the injured.



Figure 3.1: Judge Ofelia Marquez of Quezon City Regional Trial Court Branch 216, while reading the 125-decision on the Zone fire Case Trial on 2001

Source: ABS-CBN News – I Survived

The sentence that the owner and his treasurer received was a four year imprisonment. Because of this light prison term relatives of many of the victims were outraged and disappointed saying that what they got was a "cheap justice".



Figure 3.2: Raquel Ocampo, wife of Hermilo – president of Westwood Entertainment Company Inc.; weep in tears upon the resolution of the trial and the imprisonment of his husband

Source: ABS-CBN News – I Survived

Aside from the owners of the disco club being convicted, the case on ozone Tragedy included the case that involves 11 Quezon City Planning Officials and the former City Engineer Alfredo Macapugay – they were accused of graft in the granting of permits without a thorough inspection. The case is still undecided until now. Actions to dump the case were done through the move of Macapugay, 11 years after the tragedy. In his 12-page motion, Alfredo Macapugay claimed that the charges for reckless imprudence resulting to multiple homicide and multiple physical injuries filed by the Office of the Ombudsman was "defective and unsubstantiated." He

said the acts imputed against him were not the direct cause or proximate cause of deaths or injuries of the fire victims. He pointed his finger to Assistant City Engineer Benjamin Malinao saying that the building permit, building plans and occupancy permit were approved by him – Malinao, in 1992. Added to his defense, he said that the delegation of said functions was pursuant to the 1978 Order No. 44 of the Ministry of Public Works and Highways. However, prosecutor Arieta Say countered to his statements; that Macapugay had no authority to delegate his functions to his subordinates (Araneta, 2007). "The validity of Ministry Order No. 44 is not the one in question but the validity or legality of the delegation made by the accused," (Say, 2007). Moreover, the prosecution said that the DPWH secretary is the only one authorized to make such delegation of responsibility.



Figure 3.3: Victims of the Ozone Disco Tragedy in the courtroom while Judge Marquez read the decision made by the court.

Source: Philippine Daily Inquirer (March 17, 2001)



Figure 3.4: Relatives of the victims of the Ozone Disco Tragedy watch the trial and presented pictures of their loved ones who died in the tragic fire.

Source: Philippine Daily Inquirer (March 17, 2001)

Conclusion

The Ozone Fire Tragedy that happened in 1996 was indeed the worst fire Philippines had in terms of victim count; almost 350 (162 died, 95 were severely injured). Fire incidents like this could've been prevented if safety and fire preventive measures were done; in line with the standards that the Quezon City and the Philippines as whole had set through its National Building Code. It was already given that in 1996, this building code had already been set, however; some establishments were still given permit even they didn't pass the screening of the City Engineering Office of their respective cities. The concept of corruption now comes in the system wherein under-the-table transactions happen, and in return permits are given even though inspections were not done. Once establishments of poor structures had been approved to operate, this could pose a great risk to the lives of its patrons. In the case of the Ozone Disco, permit to operate shouldn't have given at the first place considering the fact that the building where it's located weren't even inspected if it met the standards that the Quezon City Engineering Office had implemented.

Experts on fire prevention, including the investigators and fire marshals that thoroughly examined the structure of Ozone and how it became a "firetrap" as they call it. These were the main reason as to why many people died in the said incident: a.) Maximum Occupancy Levels – the jazz club who originally owned the building was given permit yet a temporary one only, stating that the said building was to be used by only 35 people nut 350 which was the number of patrons when the fire broke out; b.) Fire Exits – there was only one fire exit in the building yet it was of no use, being inappropriate, for it was blocked by the neighbouring restaurant; c.) Fire Extinguishers – the employees of the club could've prevented the small fire before it engulf the whole place if there were working fire extinguishers, there were none; d.) Fire Alarm – there

were none even a single one fire alarm in the building; e.) Fire Sprinklers – there were no fire sprinklers system inside the club.; f.) Proper Electrical Wiring – the fire started in the DJ Booth were electrical wirings were not properly managed; g.) Doors – they used in-swing (can only be opened if pulled inside) doors rather than the dual in/out -swing doors.

Structure of an establishment undeniably plays a vital role in the safety and security of it – preventing disastrous accidents like fire to happen.

Recommendations

What happened on the 18th day of March, 1996 have been a lesson to everybody, especially those businessmen, to take account the structure of their establishment seriously. They should veritably follow the building code of their own cities as well as the National Building Code of the Philippines, for them and their customer's safety. Moreover, in order to don't have any Ozone Tragedy Part II for that matter, authorities should not be negligent in their job of implementing the country's fire safety regulation laws. They must be loyal to their service and never accept any bribe or involve into any under-the table transaction in order to pass one establishment in their petition of having permit to operate.

Establishments must as well do their part by providing fire preventive measures in their structures so that their patrons could be away from any harm.

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