

= 2003 Chicago balcony collapse =

On June 29 , 2003 , the deadliest porch collapse in United States history occurred in Chicago . An overloaded balcony collapsed during a party in an apartment building , killing thirteen people and seriously injuring fifty @-@ seven others . The ensuing investigation was highly critical of the way the balcony was built , finding a large number of errors in its construction which ultimately resulted in the collapse . However , the building 's owner continues to blame overcrowding on the balcony for its complete structural failure , although he has taken steps to strengthen the balconies at his properties to prevent a recurrence of the disaster . The accident resulted in sweeping inspections of similar structures across Chicago , with 1 @,@ 260 cases being actioned by the city authorities .

= = Background = =

The porch was attached to the rear of an apartment building located in the Lincoln Park neighborhood of the city 's North Side . The second and third floors were being used as a party venue at the time of the collapse . Most of the party @-@ goers were in their early 20s , and knew each other from their days at New Trier High School and Lake Forest High School of Chicago 's North Shore suburbs . One witness says she warned other people in the building that the balconies were unsafe , but another later said that " it looked like it was newly built . It looked sturdy . "

= = Collapse = =

About fifty people were on the top wooden balcony at the time of the collapse . According to one witness , the sound of splintering wood was heard immediately before the collapse , which occurred shortly after midnight local time . The collapse started on the third floor , pulling down other balconies below . The first , second , and third floor balconies all collapsed into the basement below , carrying a total of approximately one hundred people among them . Several people were also trapped in a basement stairwell . Survivors helped to pull victims out from under the debris of the balconies , and rescue workers had to use chainsaws to free others . One of the survivors was a nurse , and had started a rescue effort before the emergency services arrived . The Chicago Fire Department supplied the main rescue effort . Eleven people were killed in the collapse , with two more subsequently dying while hospitalized ; fifty @-@ seven people were injured .

= = Investigation = =

Initial inquiries suggested that the collapse was probably due to overcrowding . This was backed up by neighbors , who told authorities that the balconies were designed to hold only between twenty and thirty people . Chicago 's fire chief said that " It appears to be a case of too many people in a small space . " Norma Reyes , the city 's building commissioner , said " I have no indication of any substandard problems or insufficiencies with the porch at this time . The buildings are not made for large assemblies and parties . "

However , it was ultimately determined that poor construction was to blame . In 1998 , a permit was issued to owner LG Properties to install furnaces , air conditioners and water heaters in the building , but not to build the balcony . The balcony jutted out eleven feet from the building , one foot further than permitted by city codes , and had an area of 231 square feet (21 @.@ 5 m²) , 81 square feet (7 @.@ 5 m²) larger than permitted . The balcony also had inadequate supports , was floored with undersized lengths of wood , and was attached to the walls with screws that were too short . However , the City of Chicago 's Inspectional Services Department visited this site over 5 times and never noticed or cited the code violations noted above .

= = Aftermath = =

Three days after the disaster , the city sued the owners and managers of the building in the

Housing Court due to a number of breaches in building regulations . Those named in the complaint included LG Properties , the company 's president Philip Pappas , and George Koutroumos , the contractor who built the balcony . The city was reportedly seeking \$ 500 per violation for each day the structure was in existence , totaling hundreds of thousands of dollars , and a court order for the replacement of the balcony . The apartment block was legally uninhabitable until the balconies were replaced , as they provided mandatory emergency exits . The city 's Buildings Department inspected forty @-@ two other buildings owned or managed by Pappas and / or LG Properties for similar violations . The city also claimed that twenty @-@ one other buildings owned by Pappas had similar problems . They did , however , note the fact that he had since made " dramatic improvements " to all twenty @-@ one porches .

In the aftermath of the disaster , Chicago inspected a huge number of similar structures to ensure they were safe , with 500 cases being turned over to the city 's Law Department for court action , and 760 cases referred to administrative hearing officers .

Pappas continued to blame overcrowding for the disaster . However , an undercover press investigation discovered all his properties now display notices forbidding parties on the balconies . Pappas also claims that a police report says two unnamed witnesses informed a paramedic that they saw several people " jumping up and down " on the balconies shortly prior to the collapse .

In 2005 , the city of Chicago filed a negligence lawsuit against two of the survivors , William Fenton @-@ Hathaway and John Koranda . The city alleged that the balcony collapse occurred after defendants Fenton @-@ Hathaway and Koranda " intentionally and negligently " began jumping up and down on the porch . Koranda 's brother , Robert Koranda , was killed in the collapse . The charges against Fenton @-@ Hathaway and Koranda were later dropped .

No criminal charges were filed and Pappas was fined a total of \$ 108 @,@ 000 as a result of the collapse . Twenty @-@ seven families sued Pappas and the city over the accident . The balcony was rebuilt afterwards , this time with metal .

= = In popular culture = =

The disaster inspired the 2005 season finale of the ER television show , titled " The Show Must Go On " .