

106th-Floor Fire Routs 200 at Trade Center Lunch

Two hundred luncheon patrons were forced to leave the Windows on the World restaurant on the 107th floor of the north tower of the World Trade Center yesterday because of a small but smoky electrical fire on the floor below.

Within minutes of the alarm, the *maitres d'hôtel*, waiters, bartenders and even the cooks and busboys were ushering guests to the stairs. There were no injuries.

The most excited group seemed to be some young boys from a bar mitzvah celebration who were flipping coins to see

whether "they would live or die," an observer said.

Jeanette Way, one of a group of 28 travel agents from San Diego who were having lunch when the fire broke out at 2:08 P.M., said she first heard a small voice coming from what sounded like a walkie-talkie.

A Polite Request

"It said, 'There's a fire on 106, evacuate 107 immediately,'" she recalled. "I thought, 'My God, that can't be true. People will panic.'

"I whispered it to the woman next to

me, and she said, 'Shhh, don't let people hear.' Then a voice came over the loudspeaker, saying, 'Would everyone please evacuate the restaurant?'

"The voice was very calm. They never said the word 'fire.' That was good, because if they had, it would have been like at a soccer game when someone yells 'fire.'

"The only time I worried was when we were going down the stairs," she continued. "There were so many elderly people who were walking very slowly. I thought, if this was a severe fire, would we really get out in time?"

"But everyone was orderly, no one shoved or pushed. On the first floor, outside, everyone was joking about the 'towering inferno.' The staff was unbelievable. They made it seem like an everyday event."

Three Alarms Sounded

As the cooks stood in the hallways and acted as ushers, the guests walked down the stairs to the 100th floor. Several said they smelled smoke as they passed the 106th floor, but saw no flames. Then they rode a local elevator to the 78th floor, and finally the express to the lobby of the 110-story tower. Twenty minutes later, they were back at their seats on the 107th floor.

"There was no smoke in the restaurant," said Alan Lewis, the restaurant's director. "There was a smoke condition on the 106th floor."

The fire began in a storeroom of the restaurant that was situated in an area under construction, according to the Port Authority police, who added that the fire did not appear to be of suspicious origin. Three alarms were sounded, a standard precaution in the twin towers, and Fire Department and police officers ordered the evacuation.

Five years ago, a 19-year-old cleaning man was arrested and charged with starting six fires in the towers of the World Trade Center that caused \$2 million in damage.

Over the years, there have been a series of controversies with respect to fire protection in the buildings. In January 1976, the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey embarked on a \$14 million program to improve fire protection in the center, including the addition of more automatic sprinklers and more walls to seal off potential blazes.

"There's a public address system," Mr. Lewis said when it was all over. "We have our own fire wardens. It all went very smoothly. We were highly complimented by our guests. It was all very routine."