

Switzerland: Fire disaster in Crans-Montana claims 41st victim

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On Sunday, February 1, the 41st victim of the Crans-Montana fire disaster died in a Zurich hospital when an 18-year-old boy succumbed to his burn injuries.

The Crans-Montana fire disaster a month ago, in the early hours of New Year's Day, was not simply an unforeseeable tragedy. It was the result of deliberate negligence on the part of operators, authorities and politicians who prioritize quick profits in the tourism and real estate businesses over the safety and protection of the population.

The immediate causes of the disaster—the ignition of party sparklers in a basement bar, the flammable ceiling cladding, the lack of and overly narrow escape routes and the lack of trained staff—all reveal an indifference, recklessness and greed for profit that is unparalleled.

Nevertheless, influential friends are protecting the couple who run the bar “Le Constellation.” On Friday, Jacques Moretti was released from custody after a friend, a millionaire heir to a Geneva watch dynasty, reportedly posted bail of CHF 200,000 (€215,000) on his behalf. Moretti was arrested only on January 9, while his wife Jessica Moretti was not arrested at all. Their cell phones were not confiscated until a week after the deadly blaze.

Almost all of the revelations have been uncovered at the instigation of the victims' lawyers, rather than the Valais public prosecutor's office, which appears to be treating those responsible with kid gloves. For example, one of the victims' lawyers has presented evidence that there was a fire in the same bar in 2024, which is said to have been caused in exactly the same way, by sparklers held aloft.

One of his waiters recently revealed on the French-language Swiss channel RTS the criminal negligence with which Moretti went about his work in the party cellar. This waiter himself survived the fire only by sheer luck. As he reported, a good two weeks before the disaster, Moretti had hung scraps of foam glued down with an adhesive that was certainly not fireproof.

The waiter presented a video he sent to Moretti at the time, showing the makeshift repair to the ceiling: until the glue dried, it was held up with billiard cues and napkin packets.

Moretti's voice can be heard (to the waiter): “Try taking one [billiard cue] away. I used a glue that I'm not familiar with.”

Fifteen days later, the very same foam mats ignited in a flash after contact with the party sparklers raised up on champagne bottles. Within minutes, a flash-fire erupted, a sudden ignition of the spreading gases that turned the entire basement room into a fiery hell with temperatures reaching up to a thousand degrees.

Most of the guests were unable to leave the room in time because the only visible narrow emergency exit was immediately blocked. The bar was completely overcrowded with 300 to 400 guests. As the WSWS wrote, “the ‘Le Constellation’ bar was a highly flammable fire trap that should never have been used for a New Year's Eve party.”

There was a second emergency exit, but to reach it, one would have had to cross two more basement rooms, which were not clearly signposted, and the access door was blocked by a chair. It is not known whether anyone was able to escape through this door.

Most of the dead were found downstairs in front of the central escape staircase, and a dense crowd also formed on the ground floor, as the connecting door to the veranda exit only allowed a 90-centimeter-wide passage. One part of the door was closed here, and the door could only be opened inwardly, which was against regulations. To escape the fire, some people broke a window. Others were later found behind another escape door, which was locked.

The Moretti couple are not solely responsible. The government representatives and authorities who granted the bar an operating license despite obvious fire safety deficiencies are also responsible. It's a case of one hand washing the other.

There are actually clear rules regarding fire safety. One escape route is sufficient for up to 50 people; if there are more, at least a second escape route is required, and minimum widths are also mandatory. For 300 people or more, fire alarms, alarm systems and marked escape routes are also required. Virtually all of these requirements were disregarded.

It was not until a week after the fire disaster that the mayor, Nicolas Féraud, admitted that fire safety inspections had not been carried out in the bar for six years. They should actually be carried out and recorded annually.

In the meantime, reports on the fire safety inspections from 2018 and 2019 have been published. According to these reports, in January 2018 the safety officer of the municipality of Crans-Montana had requested Moretti to limit the number of visitors to his bar to 100 people per floor. The operator was given three months to indicate where the fire extinguishers were located. Evacuation plans and appropriate staff training were also lacking and had to be provided.

According to the investigation files, the foam that had been covering the ceiling of the basement bar since 2015 was not an issue. During the inspection in May 2019, the same demands as in 2018 were repeated because Moretti had not complied with them. Once again, he was given three months to comply with the regulations.

Since then, the bar had not been inspected again, and no questions were raised. Apparently, this was not simply an unfortunate oversight, but rather a method. Government inspections are increasingly being scaled back and fire safety is being left to the private initiative of the owners.

Switzerland is currently in the process of revising its cantonal fire safety legislation. A relaxation of the rules is planned by 2027, which will further reduce state control. Strictly in line with the motto “more market, less state,” certain owners will in future be able to replace official inspections with private expert reports.

The tourism industry in particular welcomed and promoted this relaxation. And in Valais, fire safety is the responsibility of the municipalities, whose council members are often themselves the operators of hotels, bars, mountain railways, ski lifts and shops.

In Crans-Montana, mayor Nicolas Féraud sat on several tourism and economic committees at the same time: the board of directors of the mountain railways (Vail Resorts), the board of trustees of the golf tournament, the board of directors of the local casino and several real estate and tourism foundations, as listed in the publication *Republik*. Féraud sat on the organizing committee of the 2027 World Ski Championships alongside security director Stéphane Ganzer, who is now responsible for the investigation into the fire.

More than ten years ago, in June 2015, four municipalities—Chermignon, Mollens, Montana, and Randogne—merged to form the large municipality of Crans-Montana. From then onwards, everything was to be subordinated to the tourism boom. Nicolas Féraud became the first mayor of the large municipality.

Until 2024, a single person on the municipal council was responsible for safety, with around 100 bars and restaurants to inspect. That person was Kevin Barras, a fellow member of Féraud’s FDP party.

From 2025, there was a team of five, but they boasted in a municipal publication that the inspectors were “not too strict” when it came to deficiencies. The article has since been deleted.

When the US company Vail Resort offered to practically buy up the municipality of Crans-Montana, taking over 85 percent of all public facilities, ski lifts and chairlifts, luxury hotels and shops, it was welcomed with open arms. Everything else was subordinated to the luxury tourism boom.

Politicians from all Swiss parties are currently talking big about “security” when it comes to armament, nationalism, the purchase of F-35 fighter jets and the militarization of society, but in reality they are sacrificing people’s protection and safety for profit. Crans-Montana is a telling example of this. The World Socialist Web Site wrote:

(The fire disaster).. is part of a chain of developments in which profit or power interests take precedence over human life—the coronavirus pandemic, the increase in fatal workplace accidents, the genocide in Gaza, the reintroduction of conscription in Germany—in which profit or power interests take precedence over human lives.

The protection and safety of the population will remain an empty phrase as long as the working class does not rise up to organize independently of all bourgeois parties and trade unions and establish democratic control over their working and living conditions.



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