



## Fire Safety Regulations In India

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This editorial is based on the news "[Fire and Laissez-faire: Fix Accountability for Surat Tragedy](#)" which appeared in "The Hindu" on 27<sup>th</sup> May 2019. The article talks about how the current crisis in fire safety regulation in India.

### Why in the News?

The deadly fire in a Surat coaching centre that resulted in the death of 22 young people highlights the gap in India's provision for fire safety and disaster management.

### Background

India's abysmal record on fire safety is reflected in the death of 17,700 people countrywide in fires in both public and residential buildings during 2015, according to the latest available data from the National Crime Records Bureau.

### Present Status of Fire Services in India

- Fire services in India come under the **12<sup>th</sup> schedule of the Constitution under the provisions of Article 243W of the Constitution, the performance of functions listed in the 12th schedule comes under the domain of municipalities.**  
Presently, fire prevention and fire fighting services are organized by the concerned states, Union Territories (UTs) and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs).
- Fire services in some states like Gujarat, Chhattisgarh etc. are under the respective concerned municipal corporations. In other remaining states, it is under the department in Home Ministry.
- In view of the shortcomings in the fire services in different states of the country and the need to upgrade it, the GoI in 1956 formed a **Standing Fire Advisory Committee (SFAC) under the Ministry of Home Affairs**, which was renamed as **Standing Fire Advisory Council (SFAC)** in 1980.

This committee/council has representation from each state fire service, as well

as representation from Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA), Ministry of Defence (MoD), Ministry of Road Transport and Highways (MoT), Ministry of Communications and Information Technology (MoC) and Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS)

## Shortcomings in the Present System

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- Lack of unified fire services in some of the states: unified fire services provide all the necessary guidelines and instruction in fire fighting.
- Proper organisational structure, training and career progression of its personnel lacking in most of the fire departments in India.
- inadequate modern equipment and their scaling, authorization & standardization;
- Appropriate and adequate funding is not available, which inhibits technological progression for fire fighting.
- Unavailability of training institutions is a impinges real-time environmental understanding.
- Lack of infrastructural facilities – fire stations and accommodation of personnel etc.
- Vulnerability analysis is mostly not done.
- Public awareness (DOs & DON'Ts), conduct of regular mock exercises and evacuation drills are not conducted
- Lack of Uniform fire safety legislation in some of the states.

## SFAC Provisions for Setting up Fire Stations

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- Response time (3 to 5 minutes in urban areas and 20 minutes in rural areas);
- The scale of the population to be served; and
- The number of minimum standard equipment that are needed and manpower required for its operation

### **Overall shortage in the country**

- Fire stations – 97.54%;
- Fire fighting and rescue vehicles – 80.04%;
- Fire personnel – 96.28%.

## Major Laws in India Governing Fire Safety and Governance

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The National Building Code of India, 2016

- **Part 4 of the National Building Code (NBC)** of India, 2016, is titled '**Fire and Life Safety**'.
  - It covers the requirements for fire prevention, life safety in relation to fire and fire protection of buildings.
  - The code specifies occupancy-wise classification, constructional aspects, egress requirements and protection features that are necessary to

- minimise danger to life and property from fire.
  - It specifies the demarcations of fire zones, restrictions on constructions of buildings in each fire zone, classifications of buildings based on occupancy, types of building construction according to fire resistance of the structural and non-structural components and other restrictions and requirements necessary to minimise danger of life from fire, smoke, fumes or panic before the buildings can be evacuated.
- The code broadly covers the following areas:
  - **Fire prevention:** This covers aspects of fire prevention pertaining to the design and construction of buildings. It also describes the various types of buildings materials and their fire rating.
  - **Life Safety:** This covers life safety provisions in the event of fire and similar emergencies, also addressing construction and occupancy features that are necessary to minimise danger to life from fire, smoke, fumes or panic.
  - **Fire Protection:** Covers significant appurtenances (accessories) and their related components and guidelines for selecting the correct type of equipment and installations meant for fire protection of the building, depending upon the classifications and type of building.
  - The **guidelines for fire drills and evacuations** for high-rise buildings are also specified in NBC Part 4. It mandates the appointment of a qualified **fire officer** and **trained staff** for significant land uses.
- **The Model Building Byelaws, 2003:** Point-specific responsibility for all fire-related clearance rests with the Chief Fire Officer. The concerned Development Authority shall refer the building plans to the Chief Fire Officer for obtaining clearance in respect of buildings. Any eligible building needs to undertake necessary approval or the Completion certificate will not be granted by the competent authority and the occupancy of the building cannot be administered.

## The Problems in the Current Structure

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- Cities are undergoing rapid physical changes, much like a chain reaction. A rising population demands more space to live and work. As a result, residential and commercial buildings primarily witness expansion and densification over time.
  - Even in this scenario, Firemaster plan are not being updated or revamped.**
  - Moreover, only 30% of the cities in India has any master plan.**
- Many commercial and residential buildings in particular high-rise buildings, have been found flouting fire safety norms. Many occupiers or societies do not bother to conduct regular maintenance of the fire prevention systems installed in their buildings.
  - Though Fire Safety Audit is found to be an effective tool for assessing fire safety standards of an organization or an occupancy, there are no clear cut provisions in any of the fire safety legislation in India, regarding the scope, objectives,

methodology and periodicity of a fire safety audit.

## Way Forward

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- Fire Safety Audit should be made mandatory for all over India and the audit work should be entrusted to Third Party Agencies, who have expertise in it. It is reasonable to have a fire safety audit in every year in every occupancy. Above all, the success of fire prevention and fire protection mainly depend upon the active co-operation from all personnel in an occupancy.
- **Hazard Identification & Risk Assessment (HIRA)** can be focused to identify potential hazards. A comprehensive fire safety audit can address the inherent fire hazards associated with the day to day activities in occupancy and recommend measures to reduce the potential fire hazards.
- 13<sup>th</sup> Finance commission recommendation on fire safety and organisation should be implemented. 13<sup>th</sup> FC recommendation
  - All Municipal Corporations with a population of more than one million (2001 census) must put in place a fire hazard response and mitigation plan for their respective jurisdictions
  - A portion of the grant allocated by the commission to the Urban Local Bodies may be spent on the revamping the Fire services in their jurisdiction. The ULBs may extend financial support to State Fire Services Department in this effort
- Regular provision for fire safety drill at the residential colonies, schools and such other institutions/ organisations should be conducted.

### ***Drishti Input:***

The incidents of fire tragedy cannot be called accident as it is lack of preparedness at various regulatory and organisational level. Comment.

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