

FIRE PREVENTION – NEVER TOO LATE



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The entire country commemorates the National Fire Service Day on 14th April every year. This day we once again re-dedicate ourselves and recognize those valiant fire fighters who sacrificed their lives in saving life and property. The Theme for Fire Prevention Week this year is:

FIRE IS FIRE.....FRIEND OR FOE, WE DECIDE

Recollecting the incident on 14th April 1944 a Ship named ' S. S. Fort Stikine which was docked at the Victoria Docks, Bombay (then) carrying General stores, explosives & ammunition had caught fire. The fire fighters arrived immediately and started their efforts. Though they were aware of the dangerous situation, there was no panic. Soon it became apparent that the fire was not controllable. The Flames shot mast high and there was explosion which was heard miles away. Entire Dock, up to few kms. was up in flames, 14 others ships standing alongside were also destroyed.

The exact number of dead, injured and the property lost could not be assessed. 66 firemen had laid down their lives in this heroic action combating the fire. Every Year tribute is paid to these fireman martyrs on 14th April and this is followed by Fire Prevention Week from 14th to 20th April to promote the culture of Fire Safety awareness among the masses by arranging lectures, demonstration and street plays depicting various aspects of fire safety.

The Fire Service has evolved in to what it is today because it is a service for the people. What our communities need and want from their fire service determine what we should or could be providing them. That is what makes the role of the fire fighter so exciting and fulfilling. It is a job not everyone can do. It is not a job that remains static over time; it is a constantly challenging and simulating environment where the past collides with the future in the actions of those who serve today. What is important to recognize is that the task of being a fire fighter is an old yet constantly evolving occupation.

A fire can happen at any time and at any place. The recent major fires that occurred in the State of Goa reinforce the view that fire can happen at any place. You can expect a fire at any structure irrespective of its occupancy, status.- Residential, Commercial, Industry, Hospitals, Heritage Structure, Malls and so on.....

It means that fire in any structure has the potential to cause harm to its occupants and property. And there will be risk to neighbours and their property as well. The magnitude of the problem can be reduced only when the structures are designed, constructed, equipped, maintained and operated with a view to save the life and property of its occupants. Therefore the structures need to be designed after meeting the basic infrastructure needed to protect them from fire or explosion and can withstand natural calamities like Earthquake, lightening etc.

LIFE SAFETY:

Ensuring life safety is the most important and essential aspect of all the building regulations. The National Building Code of India, 2005 version is the current basic model for all other codes in the country. As per the Notification No. 3/5/97-HD (G), dated 11th June 1998 issued under Sec (13) sub-section (1) of the Goa State Fire Force Act 1986, where every occupier of premises in any area or of any class of premises used in the Government's opinion are likely to cause risk from fire are required to take such precautions as notified in the Notification. A list of such occupancies has been notified by the Government accordingly.

The Goa Fire & Emergency Services had adopted the Fire safety measures adhering to the National Building Code of India, Part -4 as amended for time to time. The onus of installing, maintaining and documenting of fire safety measures for both Active and Passive fire protection is the responsibility of the owner or occupier of the premises.

WHAT CREATES A FIRE RISK

A combination of heat, oxygen and fuel has to be available for fire to take hold and develop. For fire to be able to spread it requires unhindered progress through apartments adjacent to where it started. In this regard Heritage buildings are particularly vulnerable. This is due to the traditional methods of construction, and the lack of effective separation between various rooms and large enclosed spaces. Frequently this combination of factors leads to total loss of the building and all its contents, as well as neighbouring properties.

HERITAGE BUILDING SAFETY

The State of Goa has many Heritage buildings which were built when an understanding of the effects of the fire did not exist in the way as it does today. Continuous roof spaces over the entire building wings, hidden voids behind plaster work in masonry partition walls, holes left in walls during the later works, all contribute to a high risk of rapid spread of fire, should an incident occur.

In order to determine the likely affect of fire in such buildings, it is necessary to have a Fire Safety Audit. This is an effective tool for assessing the fire safety standards of an occupancy which will recommend measures to reduce the potential fire hazards.

In a Heritage building the level of cultural, architectural and artistic loss also increases incrementally where the authentic value and quality of what remains following the fire in much complacency existing in the minds of the building owners and occupants on the basis “ **that it will never happen to me**”.

A more realistic consideration might lie in reflecting on the difficult question “**what do you want left after the Fire?**”. In numerous cases in the past, the reality of the fire has been “**a burnt out shell**”. The restored Buildings of Institute Menezes Braganza and the Old Secretariat (Adil Shah Palace) are good examples of ideal Fire Protection measures in Heritage Buildings.

WILD FIRES

As winter sets in, the risk of fires originating in wild dry grass and also in Cashew plantations increases. In Forests also, where normally the forest dwellers collect and utilize the dry wood and leaves, when this does not happen, wild fires erupt from friction of dry wood, and soon spreads to form large conflagration. The Government Forest Department has some preventive measures. But there are no such measures taken in Cashew Plantations and Private Forests. Every year a large number of avoidable fires occur on this account. Panchayats, Municipalities and Public Works Department authorities need to take preventive steps to avoid such fires.

Goa has a tradition of kumeri cultivation where during the winter months the vegetation on hill slopes used to be burned down for shifting cultivation purpose. The practice is now discontinued since it leads to hill erosion and loss of fertility of soil for long number of years. Wild fires on the road sides, private forests and other waste lands have been occurring in large numbers in recent years mostly due to negligence handling of fires and unsupervised burning. Such fires are a great threat to life and property of others. The increasing number of such incident can be brought down through meticulous care. The green bio-mass before it dries up can be cut and used for bio-composting or for manufacturing of bio-fuel. Even where burning has to be resorted to it should be done in a controlled manner.

The Directorate of Fire and Emergency Services is a multi hazard Response Force and is at the beck and call of the Citizens. We live by the motto “**We Serve to Save**”.

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