



## FIRE SAFETY REGULATIONS IN INDIA - GS III MAINS

Q. The tragic fire incidents in Rajkot and Delhi underscore the urgent need for stringent enforcement of fire safety regulations. Discuss the challenges related to fire safety and bring out measures taken by India in this regard. (15 marks, 250 words)

**News:** *On fire safety regulations in India | Explained*

### What's in the news?

- A deadly fire at a gaming centre in Rajkot, Gujarat on May 25 killed at least 32 people, bringing focus back on the safety of public buildings and venues.
- The TRP Game Zone carnage unfolded in the evening, as fire spread inside the structure built with a metal frame and sheets, trapping the victims including several children.

### Key takeaways:

- According to the latest Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India (ADSI) Report, released by the **National Crimes Records Bureau (NCRB)**, as many as **7,435 people were killed in over 7,500 fire accidents in 2022.**

### Major Causes of Fire Accidents:

- Electrical short circuit
- Bursting of stove or gas cylinder
- Human Negligence
- Improper storage and use of flammable items
- Bypassing norms for Fire Safety

### Provisions Regarding Fire Safety in India:

#### 1. Constitutional Provisions:

- Fire service is included in the **12th Schedule** of the Indian Constitution, which outlines municipal functions.
- Responsibility for fire prevention and firefighting services lies with the respective States, Union Territories (UTs), and Urban Local Bodies (ULBs).

#### 2. National Building Code (NBC) of India, 2016:

- Published by the **Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS)**.
- **Nature** - A “**recommendatory document**” meant for adoption by state governments into their local building by-laws, thereby making its provisions mandatory.
- **Covers** - administrative regulations, general building requirements, fire safety requirements, structural design, and construction provisions, including safety measures.

#### 3. Model Building Bye Laws, 2003:

- **Fire Clearance Responsibility** - Chief Fire Officer.



- **Process** - The relevant Development Authority must submit building plans to the Chief Fire Officer for fire clearance.
- Ensures that buildings comply with fire safety norms at various stages of construction and approval.

#### 4. National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) Guidelines:

- Specifies fire safety requirements for public buildings, including hospitals.
- **Design Guidelines:**
  - Maintaining a minimum level of open space.
  - Providing adequate exit mechanisms and stairs.
  - Conducting regular evacuation drills.

### Challenges in Fire Safety:

#### 1. Lack of Planning and Poor Implementation:

- The National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM) highlights that inadequate planning and poor implementation of norms in urban areas increase fire risks, leading to the formation of informal settlements and over-densification.

#### 2. Informal Settlements:

- Informal settlements, often excluded from building bylaws and planning regulations, are developed without considering fire safety, exacerbating the issue as the urban slum population grows.

#### 3. Inadequate Enforcement of Safety Norms:

- Despite the National Building Code (NBC) serving as a guiding document, its provisions are frequently ignored at the local level.
- Essential certifications are often neglected, and fire safety audits are underutilized due to the failure of local bodies to conduct regular checks.

#### 4. Lack of Monitoring and Compliance:

- Weak inspections and infrequent follow-ups by municipalities lead to recurring tragedies.
- Instances include hospitals operating with expired licenses and inadequate fire safety measures, and gaming centers lacking no-objection certificates and conducting risky activities during business hours.

#### 5. Inadequate Infrastructure:

- A study by FICCI-Pinkerton reveals that urban India has less than 40% of the required fire stations.
- Flammable materials like Polyurethane foam (PUF) near electrical wiring exacerbate fire risks, and many buildings lack smoke management and emergency lighting.

#### 6. Lack of Emergency Preparedness:



- Audits show a significant lack of preparedness, with many healthcare facilities lacking fire safety clearance.
- The NIDM report from 2020 highlighted the authorities' apathy towards taking preventive actions, showing that little has been learned from past fire outbreaks.

## 7. Non-Uniform Safety Legislation:

- Fire services fall under state legislation, leading to inconsistencies in safety standards.
- While many states have fire service norms, there is a notable lack of standardization and consistent safety legislation across the country.

## Way Forward:

### 1. Strict Adherence to Laws and Regulations:

- The NIDM report emphasized the urgent need for stringent adherence to fire prevention guidelines in existing structures, including regular renewal of licenses, permits, and monitoring of firefighting equipment.

### 2. Ensure Proper Compliance:

- Compliance with building bylaws and planning norms could prevent deadly incidents.

### 3. Effective Response Plans:

- Every municipality should develop a fire hazard plan in partnership with administration, fire brigade, and health department.
- Learning from global examples like Singapore, which is the safest country for fire risk, can be beneficial.

### 4. Awareness and Advancement:

- Educating the public about fire safety norms, including fire safety in school curricula, and conducting regular drills can prepare children and the public to handle such incidents

### 5. Capacity Building:

- Modernizing fire departments with advanced equipment like smoke detectors, fire hose cabinets, and automatic sprinkler systems is necessary.
- Establish efficient communication links between civilian groups in vulnerable areas and city fire brigades.
- Increased government investment in infrastructure is needed to counter fire threats effectively.

The tragic fire incidents in Rajkot and Delhi underscore the urgent need for stringent enforcement of fire safety regulations. Ensuring compliance with existing laws, enhancing accountability, and addressing infrastructure and manpower challenges are critical steps to prevent such disasters in the future.