

NEWSCLIPPINGS

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HUTS ON FIRE



Urban Resource Centre

A-2, 2nd floor, Westland Trade Centre, Block 7&8, C-5, Shaheed-e-Millat Road, Karachi.
Tel: 021-4559317, Fax: 021-4387692, Email: urc@cyber.net.pk, Website: www.urckarachi.org
Facebook: www.facebook.com/URCKHI Twitter: <https://twitter.com/urckhi>

Seven hurt as fire destroys SITE chemical factory

At least seven workers were burnt and injured while two others were rescued when a huge fire broke out in a chemical factory in SITE area on Saturday, said police, fire brigade and rescue services officials.

They added that the fire broke out in a warehouse of Adamjee chemical factory near Babar Kanta at Haroonabad, SITE.

SITE-B SHO Zawar Husain said six to seven people were burnt and injured who were taken to the Abbasi Shaheed Hospital. They were discharged after first aid as none of them received life-threatening injuries.

Two other workers were trapped in the factory but were later rescued with the help of a snorkel.

Cause of the blaze yet to be ascertained

Additional police surgeon Dr Qarar Ahmed Abbasi said that one injured, Khursheed Ahmed, 50, was taken to the Burns Centre of Dr Ruth Pfau Civil Hospital. He suffered 10 per cent burns.

Three other wounded — Usman, 27, Altaf, 25, and Mohammad Ali, 25 — were taken to the Abbasi Shaheed Hospital.

They all suffered wounds as they had jumped from a wall to save their lives.

The SHO said it was a chemical warehouse which imported sprays and other chemicals.

The blaze erupted at 9.15am. It was a huge fire and thick smoke billowing from it had engulfed nearby areas, causing breathing problems for residents.

Since chemicals were kept there, explosions took place, triggering fear and panic.

The fire brigade said the fire was controlled by 3pm, however cooling work continued till late in the evening.

A total of 14 fire engines — eight fire engines from KMC and two each from KPT, PN and PAF — took part in extinguishing work. The cause of the fire and estimation of loss could not be ascertained immediately.

However, police official Zawar Husain added that the three-storey building was badly damaged in the fire.

He said that any action about possible negligence of the factory administration may be taken into consideration in final report of fire experts.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 10/01/2021)

Compensation claims filed against Baldia factory owners

Three more claims were filed on Tuesday in the West sessions court seeking monetary compensation from Baldia factory owners for not having an emergency exit in the factory.

The claims have been filed by the heirs of three victims of the Baldia factory fire incident, demanding Rs14.6 million as compensation.

The affected families have maintained that there were no safety arrangements and emergency exit in the factory, which increased the number of casualties in the incident.

The heirs of the victims held the factory owners and the relevant authorities equally responsible for the incident.

Moreover, they stated that they had not been provided with the plots and employment as promised by the Sindh government.

The deadly fire in Ali Enterprises had claimed over 260 lives in 2012.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter 05, 13/01/2021)

Karachi is playing with fire

One of the largest industrial areas in the country, SITE, has a single fire station with only one functional fire tender at its disposal to cater to more than 4,000 factories established at this location.

Sprawled on 5,000 acres, the SITE area exports goods worth billions of rupees and generates revenue of hundreds of millions for the exchequer. Unfortunately, fire safety arrangements are not of a standard that reflects the industrial area's importance. In fact, it is a catastrophe in waiting.

Speaking to The Express Tribune, SITE Association of Industry (SAI) Chairman Abdul Hadi said that the area is a disaster with regard to fire incidents. "From October 1 to December 14, 2020, 47 fire-related incidents occurred. No casualties were reported, but they caused a financial loss of between Rs700 million to Rs800 million."

He said that the industries located in the SITE area have independent fire-fighting services, but these are inadequate to deal with big blazes. He added that most of the industries produce or process fire-prone commodities including cotton, cotton thread and chemicals.

“The timely arrival of fire tenders, say within 15 to 20 minutes, can help stop the spread of fire. The shortage of fire tenders causes a delay and leads to losses. The factories dealing in exports are required by their buyers to maintain fool-proof fire safety arrangements. Apart from an inspection conducted by a third party, the buyers personally pay surprise visits to inspect the factories.”

Refuting rumours that fire incidents were planned for insurance fraud, Hadi said that the management of these factories in a personal capacity had improved the fire-fighting capabilities after the Baldia tragedy.

“Factory owners and/or investors set up a factory to make returns. A fire can stop production activities for several months, causing the owners to lose potential customers. Therefore, no business owner would plan a fire incident for a meager and questionable benefit.”

The SAI chairperson welcomed the Centre’s recent decision to give Karachi fire tenders. He said new fire tenders would be given to seven industrial areas of Karachi, which would be maintained by the industrial areas’ associations.

“The FB Area and North Karachi industrial areas are equipped with two fire tenders each. The SITE association being a much larger one should be given at least six fire tenders.”

Lax safety measures

According to Chief Fire Officer Muhammad Mubeen, nearly 90 per cent factories not only lack basic fire-fighting arrangements but their staff has no training to deal with fires.

Mere possession of fire extinguishing equipment is not enough, he said, adding that factory staff needs to be trained, and there should be regular practical demonstrations of putting out fires and conducting emergency evacuation drills.

“Many of the industrial units and factories do not have emergency exits. The buildings are not designed in a manner to facilitate fire tenders’ easy and quick access, and they do not have central fire alarms. This factor significantly multiplies the damage caused by the fires.”

CFO Mubeen added that on court orders, legislation in this regard is being done in Sindh. “The Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA) will withhold approval to start operation in a factory if it is not designed to effectively deal with an emergency situation.” He added that the fire brigade officials will inspect industries and only then will they receive approval.

Meanwhile, former chairperson of Korangi Association of Trade and Industry, Sheikh Omar Rehan, said that at least two major fire incidents occurred in Korangi last year. Fire tenders from various areas of the city had to be summoned to put out the fire.

Commenting on the recommendation to let the SBCA supervise the fire rescue arrangements in the industrial areas, Rehan said that the fire brigade in Karachi should be entrusted with the task as it is their job. “Supervision of one institution by another institution would create unnecessary hurdles.”

(By Kashif Hussain The Express Tribune, 04, 21/01/2021)

Fighting fires

The federal government has recently imported dozens of fire tenders and dedicated around 50 of them, including large snorkels, to the financial hub of the country, Karachi. Some of these will be given to the industrial areas operating in the city while some others will go to a few charitable organisations operating their own mini-fire services. This is a welcome and a long-overdue gesture on the part of the federal government.

A city of the expanse, density and magnitude of Karachi, which has seen multiple industrial incidents where infernos have caused heavy damage in terms of human, material and financial loss, has but a handful of operational fire trucks parked in government-run fire stations around the city. Fewer still are large trucks with telescopic ladders and arms which are capable of reaching upper floors of its fast-developing high-rises. At a ceremony to dedicate the recently imported fire tenders, the governor relayed that of the 40 fire tenders present in the city, only 11 are operational. Industrialists have also raised the alarm that in one of the oldest industrial estates of the city, SITE, there is just one fire tender available, stationed at the sole fire station servicing the entire estate.

While it is true that most industrial units in the city, rather the country, have poor or non-existent fire safety mechanisms, drills and equipment — something which should be ensured by the Civil Defence department — it still does not address the issues which arose during past major industrial fires where the response from the fire department was either slow or inadequate to tackle the size and nature of the blaze. There is a need to revamp the entire fire department of Karachi, including increasing the number of fire stations, firemen and the number of fire trucks. Further, there is a need to ensure the provision of adequate funds to keep these imported trucks in working order apart from ensuring that industries and other workplaces follow prescribed fire safety guidelines and train staff.

(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 25/01/2021)

Three labourers killed in factory fire in Karachi

Flames engulfed a thread factory in Baldia Town on Tuesday night, claiming the lives of three labourers and leaving two others injured.

One of the deceased was reportedly killed when he went back inside the building to rescue his fellow labourers.

In a video statement on Wednesday, a manager of the factory located near Mowach Morh blamed the delayed response of the fire department for the deaths, whereas the fire department pointed out flaws in the factory building that made it a fire hazard.

'Little room to exit'

According to Chief Fire Officer Muhammad Mobin, flames initially erupted on the ground floor of the three-storey building but the blaze soon spread to other floors.

The fire chief said that there was only one entry and exit point to the building, and only one staircase to ascend to, or descend from, the upper floors. Besides, he added, the windows were sealed with iron grills. These factors caused extreme inconvenience to fire officials during the extinguishing operation, said Mobin.

It took five hours to completely extinguish the blaze and fire teams were assisted with water tankers during the process, after which the cooling process followed, said the fire chief, adding that the fire teams had reached the site with four fire tenders and one snorkel.

The flames on the first floor were doused first using the snorkel, the fire chief told.

Most of the workers inside the factory at the time of the fire had exited the building but a search was launched for the three missing labourers on the request of their colleagues after cooling process was completed, according to Mobin.

Fatalities

Three burnt bodies were retrieved from the charred building.

The deceased were identified as Fayyaz, 20, Kazim, 21, and Ali Sher, 25, said the police, adding that all three were residents of a nearby area. It was Sher who had managed to exit the factory alive but went back inside to save the others, according to police. The deceased were shifted to Dr Ruth Pfau Civil Hospital.

A fire official, Muhammad Shoaib, 25, was injured during the extinguishing operation when he was hit by a rod while a rescue worker suffocated due to the smoke. Both the injured were shifted to a hospital.

Speaking to the media, Kazim's brother, Muhammad Ishaq, said that that him and his brother lived in the factory and that he had left the building for a short while when the fire broke out.

Finding flames licking the building when he returned, a panicked Ishaq called his brother and was told that Kazim and others had moved to the topmost floor of the building but the fire had spread there as well.

Ishaq was not able to contact Kazim again, he said. The families of Haider and Fayyaz also lamented that there were no arrangements to deal with an emergency situation in the building. The lack of an emergency exit led to the deaths, they believed.

'Delayed response'

In the video statement issued on Wednesday, a manager of the factory claimed that the fire teams reached the site after a delay of two hours.

There were around 22 to 25 workers in the building at the time of the fire and all, except three, managed to come out of the factory on their own by the time the fire teams arrived, said the manager.

The fire had broken out in the store and the warehouse on the ground floor, he said.

According to him, the fire tenders arrived at intervals and ran out of water soon after the operation was launched. He said that the factory management arranged some 16 to 17 water tankers for the extinguishing operation and the snorkel reached the site even after that.

He further stated that the workers who had managed to exit the factory tried to control the flames with fire extinguishers and one of them entered the building again to bring another fire extinguisher but the electricity wires caught fire and the power supply was suspended. The fire erupted around 11.15pm and the fire teams arrived at 1am despite the factory owner informing the fire department immediately after the flames ignited, said the manager. The bodies of the three deceased were retrieved by 5.30am, he added.

When the SITE Fire Station was contacted later on Wednesday, fire official Bilal Aqeel said that the complaint was received at 11.35pm on Tuesday night and only one fire tender was available at the station at the time. It was dispatched immediately, he told. The cause of the fire could not be ascertained till the filing of this report.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter The Express Tribune, 04, 11/02/2021)

Urdu Bazaar fire

Fire incidents do occur in hot weather. However, the element of human error and official neglect cannot be ruled out in the huge fire that engulfed the Urdu Bazaar in Rawalpindi this Thursday. Around 23 shops were destroyed in the blaze causing losses worth billions

of rupees to shopkeepers and traders. Two buildings collapsed, 20 motorcycles were burnt to ashes and several other vehicles damaged. Several other buildings too had become weak as a result of the fire, and they might have to be torn down.

Traders have attributed the devastating fire to negligence on the part of local Wapda officials, saying the fire erupted due to high-voltage wires hanging precariously in the congested locality. They claim that the relevant authorities failed to act despite their repeated complaints in this regard, and things were left to deteriorate. The extent and intensity of the fire can be gauged from the fact that it took more than two dozen water tankers and many fire tenders several hours to douse it. Smoke was seen rising till the next day, and near the ruins of some of the burnt-down shops and buildings it felt hotter than in other areas. Loss of life was prevented due to timely intervention of fire-fighters and administration officials. Only an elderly man has suffered 27% burns. However, a search and rescue operation is underway.

Conjectures that neglect played a significant role in the rapid spread of the fire are reinforced by the fact that the Urdu Bazaar is an ancient market, wood had been profusely used in the construction of several buildings and the locality is densely populated. So there was the need for putting in place better fire safety measures for the locality. All this shows that something somewhere went wrong leading to enormous losses to traders. If the inquiry establishes that the fire was caused due to official neglect, it would be a terrible example of carelessness.

(By Editorial The Express Tribune, 14, 04/04/2021)

Big fire hits garment factory

A big fire broke out at a garment factory in Orangi Town on Sunday afternoon.

Fire Brigade official said that the blaze started in a portion of the factory, located in Orangi Town-5, at about 2pm and spread to its other parts. He said seven fire tenders were employed to put out the fire. It took the firefighters about six hours to extinguish the fire, he added.

The official said that one of the firefighters received burns on his hands during the struggle. The cause of the fire or estimate of the loss could not be ascertained immediately.

Youth shot dead

A youth was shot dead in Ittehad Town on Sunday evening, according to police.

They said that the youth, Raheel Ahmed, 20, was attacked by unknown suspects in Nawab Colony.

Area SHO Zafar Ali Shah said the attack seemed to be outcome of some personal enmity between the attackers and the victim.

The body was transported to the Dr Ruth Pfau Civil Hospital for a post-mortem examination and then handed over to the heirs.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 26/04/2021)

Huge fire hits garment factory in New Karachi

A huge fire that broke out in a garment factory in New Karachi Industrial Area on Saturday night was on Sunday put out and the cooling process was still going on, according to officials.

They said that no casualty was reported in the fire.

They said that the blaze erupted in the Al-Awal garment factory at around 10:30pm on Saturday. Initially, a few fire tenders were sent, but after realising the intensity of the fire more fire tenders from five stations were sent since it was declared a third-degree fire.

The Karachi Water and Sewerage Board had declared a state of emergency at its Sakhi Hasan hydrant to ensure smooth supply of adequate water for controlling the fire.

Deputy Commissioner-Central Dr Raja Mahar said 16 fire tenders were called from across the city to control the blaze.

The fire brigade said the fire was controlled at around 12noon Sunday but cooling work was continued. The cause of the fire and estimation of the financial loss could not be ascertained immediately.

New Karachi Industrial Area SHO Younus Khattak said that an electrical short circuit might have caused the fire. He said that there were no workers inside the industrial unit because of weekly off.

Meanwhile, the president of the area traders' association, Faisal Moeed, told the media that fire tenders provided by the federal government were present in the area but the staff was not available to run the same and put out the fire.

He said a timely action by the district administration saved other factories from possible destruction.

(By Newspaper's Staff Reporter Dawn, 13, 31/05/2021)