

State Govt instruct the BMC to fill vacancies in Fire brigade

To prevent fire-related mishaps and deaths in Mumbai, the BMC is undertaking a fire safety audit of 6,512 establishments in the city and is mapping areas with buildings which run fire risk. The Maharashtra government will also frame standard operating procedures (SOPs) for, and fix responsibility on, the around 4,000 private licensed fire audit agencies in Mumbai.

"The BMC has identified 6,512 establishments and buildings in Mumbai and has divided them into six categories... and their fire audit is underway," said chief minister Devendra Fadnavis. He was speaking in the state legislative assembly on Thursday during a discussion on a calling attention motion moved by leader of the Opposition Radhakrishna Vikhe-Patil on the June 30 fire in the Wafa medical store in Juhu galli in Andheri West which caused nine deaths.

"Area mapping of high fire risk buildings has been done by the municipal corporation and the fire safety audit of those areas is underway," he noted, adding that the civic body would be asked to speed this up.

Fadnavis referred to how fire safety audits had to be undertaken twice a year for such buildings. There were no SOPs for these 4,000 licensed agencies in Mumbai on issues like whether the certification was right and what action was to be taken if the certification was wrong.

"We have created 4,000 certifying authorities. We will prepare SOPs to (deal with situations like) a fire in a building despite these authorities certifying it or if it comes to light that there are some lacunae (in the audit). The municipal corporation will be told to digitally monitor... the buildings which have been certified. SOPs will also be prepared to fix responsibility and take action on licensed agencies which have given certification after which incidents have taken place," said Fadnavis.

While replying to a question by BJP's Parag Alavani (Vile Parle) about low penalties levied under the BMC Act, 1888, which failed to act as a deterrent, Fadnavis stated that these penalty amounts were decided around 50 years ago and hence, they would revise them. The state government will also instruct the BMC to improve the vacancy position and fill vacancies in the fire brigade.

Minister of state for urban development Dr Ranjit Patil said that there were times where the fire brigade also found it difficult to even reverse in

narrow lanes and the purchase of smaller water tankers was being considered.

He pointed to how electric meters were put up under the staircases in old, dilapidated buildings and these meters also lacked advanced systems like tripping.

In 2015-16, there were a total of 5,212 fire-related accidents in Mumbai, of which 3,417 were due to electrical faults.

In 2012, after the fire in the state administrative headquarters of Mantralaya, the state government had asked local self-government bodies and special planning authorities to conduct fire safety audits of private establishments with high footfalls like cinema halls, hospitals, commercial complexes, malls and large offices. The fire safety audit was to be conducted twice a year – January and July – by licensed fire audit agencies. It had also asked for such audits to be conducted in government and semi-government buildings and those housing public establishments.