

FIRE HAZARDS AND FIREFIGHTING IN PAKISTAN



WEBINAR - OCT 2020



INTRODUCTION TO IQBAL INSTITUTE OF POLICY STUDIES (IIPS)

Iqbal Institute of Policy Studies (IIPS) is an independent research institute with the mission to generate, track, and advocate public policies towards the achievement of sustainable development in Pakistan. In addition to taking on research projects for policy advocacy, IIPS has embarked upon the concept of swift research wherein it undertakes time-bound research and compiles a series of reports for the attention of policy and decision-makers.



Undertake quality research and policy analyses for sustainable national development



Conduct research on emerging technologies for industrial application



Serve as a collaborative platform for dissemination of research, exchange and dialogue



Support endeavours for socio-economic development through research and analyses



Build capacity and competence to respond to research and policy needs at national level



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Develop viable connectivity between academia and industry for applied R&D

The overwhelming number of fire-related incidents raise questions on the sustainability of Pakistan's infrastructure. A horrific fire in Lahore's famous Hafeez Center recently gutted hundreds of shops and inflicted heavy losses on traders. Disasters stemming from buildings catching fire have become a routine occurrence. A permanent solution is needed to ensure the safety of human life. Keeping in mind the severity of the issue, Iqbal Institute of policy studies organised a live webinar to highlight the reasons behind the rising incidents of building fires in Pakistan and suggest the possible strategies to counter such devastations.

SESSION OBJECTIVES

1. To have an online discourse on the causes and preventive measures of fire eruption in buildings
2. To understand the challenges of fire fighting in Pakistan.
3. To shed light on the building code of Pakistan 2016
4. To highlight how fire hazards can be minimized through proper town planning
5. To discuss the importance of educating engineers, architects and professionals in fire safety and prevention

OUR DISTINGUISHED SPEAKERS

IIPS has embarked upon the concept of swift research. Almost every week, we hear about buildings catching fire and the insufficient response resulting in loss of innocent lives and property. IIPS invited eminent speakers to discuss the causes of fire eruption in buildings and to suggest possible solutions to prevent such devastations in the future.



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The details of speakers and video of webinar may be found on:
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Topic: Causes and preventive measures of fire eruption in buildings

MR. ZEESHAN ALAM, GM FIRE AND SAFETY AT DANISH INTERNATIONAL

Fire Hazards are considered as one of the most lethal and common types of all man-made disasters. Their pervasive ability to cause loss of life and property is disturbing. Globally and in Pakistan, thousands of people have died along with billions of rupees of infrastructural loss. The Baldia Town incident is considered one of the most destructive incidents of fire in Pakistani history. However, the concerned government authorities have not learnt from the experience. The misuse of insurance policies and violation of fire safety regulations are some of the main issues which require immediate attention. Non-compliance with fire safety regulations has been under the limelight after this incident. The issue of fire safety should be prioritized as even a small fire can become contagious, spreading to other buildings in the area. Awareness levels are important determinants in assessing the critical nature of fire. A fire incident can be prevented from its origin if the required personnel are educated in fire safety protocols. Rapid response stations installed at nearby locations can help prevent future fire incidents. It is highly recommended that the local governments install and upgrade fire stations in different locations across the cities.



Topic: Building code of Pakistan: fire safety provision 2016

MR. IMRAN TAJ- PRESIDENT FPAP

The US National fire safety policy is a state of the art compliance procedure that acts as a benchmark for international standards. Pakistan adopted USNFS policy as its building code in 2016. However, there is a severe gap in implementation which needs to be corrected. The fifteen chapter report provides a holistic description of fire safety in layman terms. A building, being a man-made entity, is inherently bound to have problems, and in situations such as fire eruption, the means of egress is the single most crucial aspect which can protect the occupants of the building. Apart from that, signage has high value as people in the buildings, who are informed about the exit strategy, can be guided through signage. Also, fire doors, and the material with which the building is made, is crucial to prevent the possibility of fire eruption. Since high rise building infrastructure is trending, the exit staircases and integration of exit points are vital for safety.



Topic: Causes and preventive measures of fire eruption in buildings

DR. MUHAMMAD MASOOD RAFI- PROFESSOR NED

In the creation of any infrastructure or building, protection from natural and man-made disasters has to be integrated into the design and formation stages of construction. Since fire hazards in buildings are a man-made disaster, a careful study needs to be carried out in national universities regarding the issue. The practical education of students in dealing with fire safety will add to their professional knowledge in creating an infrastructure which can minimize future hazards. Documentation is another realm which requires attention in Pakistan as accurate data on fire incidents and their causes is necessary to deal with this issue. The probable causes of fire hazards are not only man-made but can be attributed to natural causes like earthquakes. That is why evidence of fire safety codes can be found in historical records of infrastructures created thousands of years ago. Fire safety codes started to develop from Hammurabi's time and later evolved into formal regulations after the London building fires. The safety codes were formalized in America after the fire incident in Baltimore, as a result of which the United States National Fire Safety Code was established. Fire safety needs more emphasis, as it is the design of buildings which prevents the eruption of fire in the first place. In Pakistan, architects and civil engineers have not paid due attention to fire safety design in the creation of infrastructure, making it a much-neglected issue.



Topic: Challenges of firefighting in Pakistan.

MR. SAEED AKHTAR JADOON, CHIEF FIRE OFFICER

A lack of recognition of services laid out by firemen in the line of such hazards deeply affects their morale. Lack of awareness in the young masses affects their ability to choose firefighting as a career. This is a worrisome trend as the work of firefighters is not only noble but requires the expertise of young and talented people who will bring innovation and diversity to the field. He ended his opinion by saying that fire fighting is only the last line of defence. Building owners need to play their role by employing good and sustainable quality building material rather than waiting for a fire fighting team to rescue them.



Topic: Minimizing fire hazards through proper town planning

**KHURRAM BARGATT,
MEMBER IIPS ADVISORY BOARD**

In town planning, building by-laws are the first step to the creation of sustainable infrastructure. Negligence on this step leads to complications in the future. Besides, the lack of building bye-laws is worsened by the absence of implementation and regulation. Fire incidents can become more disastrous if the building by-laws are not followed. For instance, if bye-laws are not taken into consideration during the construction of buildings, it will pose a risk to the fire safety of other structures nearby. Fire safety design is the most common violation in most buildings found on the busiest roads of Rawalpindi and Lahore. According to global standards of building construction, the quality of infrastructure in the country is at best, ordinary. Such a level of structure keeps buildings which are in proximity to each other at a greater risk of catching fire. Apart from construction standards, the equipment used in buildings is sub-standard. The SOPs followed in case of fire eruption are also not communicated to the occupants of the building in advance. The SOPs are essential in case of fire disasters to regulate the mechanised flow of people. Schools and public buildings like mosques, hospitals and commercial cities need to have drill management and rescue lines. Fire safety and rescue lanes for free movement for firefighting vehicles on public roads can help the firefighters reach the affected destination swiftly. Finally, the installation of a database which keeps a record of the state of buildings and infrastructure is vital for the development of related policy.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Lack of attention to safety procedures, poor understanding of global safety standards, understated vigilance, and general unawareness of fire and hazard systems were presented as major underlying causes of fire hazards in Pakistan.
- Major incidents were brought to light such as Baldia town factory fire and the much recent Hafeez centre Lahore tragedy.
- Fire safety should be included in curriculums, and strict measures should be adopted to implement the building code of Pakistan.
- Small rapid response stations at closer distances along with alarm systems at buildings can significantly improve the situation.
- Advancements in research technology were also presented, which would facilitate the process of finding better methods to deal with the fire. Fire safety design must be implemented at the core of building design. This should not be done without paying attention to key human behavioural patterns during hazards.
- Specific importance was laid on rapid response and the factors which facilitate it.
- The problem of neglecting fire safety laws and undermining their importance presented as a key factor in fire hazards.
- Another area of contention in fire hazards pertains to the construction of the building itself and the materials used thereof. It is essential that ingredients for the fire to spread are not used in construction or furnishing of the buildings.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Furthermore, there is a need to develop a database which facilitates policymaking. Response times and failure rates should be maintained as a record for future improvements.
- Clear exit strategies and markings were required by law to assist people in challenging situations. It is not the response of firefighters which make a difference, but rather it is how the people react in such cases which makes a difference. He also highlighted the use of cheap and low-quality materials in construction and dismal practice of safety precautions.
- A lack of recognition of services laid out by firemen in the line of such hazards deeply affects their morale.
- Lack of awareness in the young masses affects their ability to choose firefighting as a career. This is a worrisome trend as the work of firemen is not only noble but requires the expertise of young and talented people who will bring innovation and diversity to the field.

