

The Hindu 24.09.2014

GHMC wings at loggerheads as fire mishaps rise in Hyderabad

HYDERABAD: While the two constituent bodies of the GHMC - the town planning department and the fire prevention wing are at loggerheads, statistics show that fire accidents are on the rise with 11 fire mishaps reported since March.

An eatery was gutted in fire in Punjagutta recently, but that does not seem to be enough to act as a wakeup call for the GHMC. "Whenever there is a fire, we hear a lot of hue and cry, but it dies down soon after. The town planning department of the GHMC is issuing trade licences without bothering about the mandatory fire NOCs," said P Venkatramana, additional director, fire prevention wing of the GHMC.

When it comes to fire safety in commercial establishments, authorities seem to be least bothered about possible mishaps. Statistics show that Greater Hyderabad Municipal Corporation (GHMC) issued only 150 no-objection certificates (NOCs), while thousands of shops were given trade licences since 2010.

The fire prevention wing carries out inspections to validate

building plans and checks fire prevention norms like escape staircases and water supply among others. But the trade licence department and the town planning wing do not seem to care much about fire safety norms. "I had asked the commissioner Somesh Kumar to integrate services of the town planning department with the fire prevention wing. So, whenever a builder approaches the planning department, we can inspect the said building and give a NOC. But, this plan is still lying in limbo," he added.

The civic department officials had thought of having an online process for all departments and a single window system for obtaining trade licences, fire NOCs etc. This project was given to the Centre for Good Governance (CGG) for execution. However, officials say that there has been no progress on this front.

"The GHMC seems to be not keen in implementation of government policies to tackle fire disasters. Only a bare minimum of the city's buildings adhere to the fire prevention rules but GHMC officials not bothered to make this rule mandatory for all the high-rise," quipped another official privately.

The fire department had asked the GHMC commissioner to recruit at least two officers for each of the 18 circles in the city. Currently, the fire prevention wing of the GHMC is manned by only five officials.

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Wednesday, 24 September 2014 07:07 -
