



Fatal fires

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Fatal fires-Fire safety norms for hospitals need to be strengthened and strictly enforced

- The devastating fire at the Andheri hospital of the Employees State Insurance Corporation in Mumbai that killed at least eight people is a shocking reminder of the low priority fire safety gets in India.
- That a blaze could break out in a relatively new building with such deadly consequences calls into question the precautions taken by the authorities.
- The Maharashtra government should conduct a thorough probe and examine the claim made by the Fire Department that the hospital had failed an inspection recently and was served a notice.
- It would be shockingly negligent if the hospital continued to function without adhering to fire safety standards in spite of an adverse report from the statutory authority.
- Ironically, ESIC is a welfare organisation working to protect the health and well-being of the labour sector, and is expected to set an example through the quality of its facilities.
- A strong building code with features for reduction of fire hazards is important for all structures, but it is more so for hospitals since they host people who are incapacitated and cannot be evacuated quickly.
- The National Accreditation Board for Hospitals and Healthcare Providers (NABH) goes by the National Building Code and its specific norms for hospitals, which include minimum requirements for multi-storeyed structures, such as alarms, sprinkler systems, specified-width staircases, smoke barrier enclosures and checks against storage of combustible materials in areas where patients are kept.
- Going forward, all State governments should require mandatory compliance with such safety features for any institution handling patients or giving care.
- Certification of facilities through third-party audit should be made compulsory to eliminate conflicts of interest involving official agencies.

- The institutions should also be insured for the highest levels of public liability.
- At a broader level, governments must shed their indifference and work to make all spaces safe.

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