

How fire safe is your child's school building?

Fire Brigade's ongoing survey of private schools, to ascertain adherence to safety norms, paints an alarming picture

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City's swank private school buildings, where your kids spend more than six hours every day, may not be fire safe. This was revealed by the Mumbai Fire Brigade which has initiated a thorough checking of all the school buildings in the city to ascertain whether they are following fire safety norms.

Out of approximately 1400 private schools fire brigade has surveyed more than 350 schools until now for fire safety norms. And many of these schools have failed to meet the standards laid down by the development control regulations of the BMC and fire brigade.

Manisha Mhaiskar-Patankar, additional municipal commissioner, elaborated, "We are fol-

lowing Supreme Court's directive given in a fire accident in a school at Kumbakonam, Chennai, which claimed the lives of 90 students aged between five and nine on July 16, 2004."

She said that over a period of time, the (BMC) wants to cultivate a culture of total compliance to fire safety norms in the city. "So we are surveying all the schools in the city. If they are found violating the norms, Fire Act, 2005 which was implemented from the year 2009 will be invoked and suitable action will be taken against the school management. The Fire Act envisages all the buildings in the city are fire safe," Mhaiskar-Patankar said.

The survey involves gathering all the details of the school buildings in the city and presenting a report to the director



A file photo of firemen extinguishing a blaze at Goregaon (W)

of fire services. He will put together a state report and hand it over to the state government,

which will then submit it to the Supreme Court. With 350 schools covered so far, the sur-

vey is only in the second stage.

Many private schools are built in small plots without enough open space around the buildings. This can be risky for the students in the event of fire accidents.

Uday Tatkare, chief fire officer said, "In our initial survey of the school buildings, we have found lacunas in the fire fighting system in several cases."

He said that the department is checking the means of escape in various school buildings.

"Especially in the centrally air-conditioned schools. We urge all schools to follow the stipulated norms for the sake of children's safety. If however, the schools refuse to comply, the report will be submitted to the civic authorities and the state government will take suitable action," Tatkare said.

CHECKLIST FOR SCHOOL BUILDINGS

- Sufficient open space around the school building
- Well-maintained, wide staircases
- Easily covered distance from the classroom to the staircase
- Wide common passage
- Sufficient and easily accessible fire extinguishers
- In case of AC schools, sufficient and well-placed smoke detectors and sprinklers

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