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Disaster Preparedness During Fire Incidents: Special Reference To Dimapur District, Nagaland

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Abstract

Dimapur is located in the southwest corner of Nagaland, with the Dhansiri River, a tributary of the Brahmaputra River, flowing east of the city. The majority of the area is flat, making it prone to various natural disasters. Summers in Dimapur are characterized by hot and humid weather, while winters tend to be relatively cold. According to a report from the Nagaland Fire and Emergency Services, there were 878 fire incidents reported between 2013 and 2020, resulting in the loss of 13 lives. Unfortunately, there have been several fire accidents in Dimapur in 2021-2024, leading to devastating consequences such as the destruction of homes, loss of valuable property and cash, injuries, and the misplacement of important documents. Fire disasters are among the most common emergencies faced in Nagaland, alongside earthquakes, floods, and landslides. The Nagaland Fire and Emergency Services are working diligently to safeguard lives and property from such disasters, even as urbanization continues to expand in towns like Kohima and Dimapur. In response to the increasing frequency of fire incidents, the Department has submitted a proposal to the government, urging the inclusion of fire disaster prevention measures in the Kohima Smart City Plan. While the department and firefighters are prepared to respond to fire emergencies, it is crucial to assess the readiness of the public, families, and children in handling such crises. Therefore, the objective of this paper is to examine the level of preparedness among families with children in the event of a fire disaster. It is essential to ensure that all members of the community are equipped with the necessary knowledge and resources to effectively respond to and mitigate the impact of fire emergencies.

Keywords: fire accidents; disaster; preparedness

Introduction

Throughout history, humans have always possessed two powerful tools: language and fire. The discovery of fire revolutionized human life, making it easier and more efficient. Early humans quickly learned that fire was not just a source of heat, but a crucial technique for preparing food and cultivating crops. By harnessing the power of fire, early humans were able to improve their quality of life and even fight diseases. Fire has played a significant role in shaping human civilization, distinguishing us as the only species capable of controlling and creating fire. Despite the dual nature of fire, being both a force for good and evil, its importance in our daily lives cannot be understated. From keeping us warm and nourished to providing light and comfort, fire serves a multitude of purposes that enhance our existence. The mastery of fire is considered one of mankind's greatest achievements, enabling countless advancements and innovations. As we reflect on the profound impact of fire on our lives, we come to appreciate its true significance. A small spark has the power to ignite a flame, symbolizing the potential for both creation and destruction. In today's world, the threat of fire-related disasters looms large, particularly in rapidly urbanizing areas like Nagaland, specifically Kohima and Dimapur. The increasing population density and infrastructure development in these regions have heightened the risk of fire incidents. While fire remains one of the most common disasters, it is also one of the most preventable. By implementing safety measures such as smoke detectors and educating families on fire escape plans, the devastating effects of fire can be mitigated. Every household must take the responsibility of preparing for potential fire emergencies seriously, as the impact of such disasters can be long-lasting, especially on children. By prioritizing fire safety and preparedness, we can ensure the well-being and security of our communities.

The following table shows the fire incidents¹ that took place from 2022 to 2020 in Dimapur district.

Table 1.1: Fire incidents in Dimapur District

Date and year of fire incidents	Place & time	Cause	Casualty	Property & materials Loss in	Total cost
March 13, 2022	Public College of Commerce, Dimapur, 2: 30 pm	Short circuit	No casualty	Godowns and houses were burnt down including a vehicle which was partially gutted by fire	NA
Apr 18, 2022	Assam-Nagaland border near Nagaland new field check gate. received a call about the fire incident at around 7:48 pm	Not known	No casualty	10 shops and few houses were destroyed	NA
11 November, 2021	Khermahal, near Tata parking in Dimapur around 8 pm	Not known	at least two-three persons were injured but no casualty reported	According to police the CGI sheet and bamboo walled huts housed around 80-100 rooms over a leased plot by daily wage labourers and their families, more than 20 LPG gas cylinders had exploded	NA
21 February, 2021	Parking lot for oil tankers at Kevijau colony, Dimapur, 4 pm	Use of matchstick or lighter near the fuel in a drum/container. Fire was doused and prevented from spreading further.			NA
March 25, 2021	Stadium, Dimapur, 4:59 pm	suspected to be from a wire short circuit in the vehicle	No casualty	One vehicle was burnt	property worth around Rs 6 lakh was lost
March 25, 2021	National Institute of Technology Dimapur,	Jungle fire but could not be ascertained.	No casualty		NA

¹ All of the information was gathered from several Nagaland newspapers. Source details have been mentioned in the references.

	Chümoukedima, 1:40 pm	F&ES team from Fire Station was able to douse the fire within an hour and prevented it from spreading to the surrounding areas			
April 29, 2021	Burma camp, Dimapur, midnight	unknown	One person was charred to death	More than 100 thatched houses were destroyed	NA
October 21, 2021	Signal Rio colony, Dimapur. Early hours 1:46 am (west fire and Emergency Services received call)	Electric short circuit	No casualty		Properties worth around INR 20 lakh were damaged.
June 21, 2020	Diphupar 'A,' 4th Mile, 11:19 am	due to short circuit	No casualty	One Assam type house was completely razed down	property worth Rs 70 lakhs was destroyed
January 25, 2020	Dimapur's Burma Camp area from Chungaizaeang Rongmei Colony	unknown	No casualty	1 godown, 5 houses gutted	NA
April 7, 2020	Veterinary Colony, Dimapur, 9:35 pm	Unknown. Fire personnel and colony residents were able to bring the flames under control	No casualty	Pucca house was severely damaged	NA
September 14, 2020	Zeliang Colony, Burma Camp, Dimapur	Due to commercial LPG cylinder hose leakages. timely response from Fire Personnel, properties worth over Rs 10 lakh could be salvage and prevented the fire from spreading and also the gas cylinder from explosion	no casualty		NA

The data presented in the table above indicates that fire incidents occurring between 2020 and 2022 were primarily caused by electric short circuits. While the number of casualties and injuries was minimal, the financial losses in terms of property and materials were substantial, amounting to lakhs. These losses can be attributed to a lack of disaster preparedness to effectively manage and contain fires. Emergency calls are only made once a fire has already started, resulting in delayed response times from fire brigades. By the time they arrive at the scene, significant damage has already been done due to the inability to control the fire promptly. Furthermore, challenges such as traffic congestion and narrow roadways impede the timely arrival of fire trucks, hindering their ability to effectively combat fires. The limited access to colonies and high-rise buildings exacerbates the situation, making it difficult for fire personnel to navigate and respond swiftly during emergencies. Despite repeated concerns raised by authorities and media outlets, little action has been taken to address these critical issues. Additionally, the lack of adequate protective gear and equipment for firefighters further jeopardizes their safety and effectiveness in combating fires. The government's reluctance to invest in improved training and resources underscores the urgent need for enhanced disaster preparedness measures. As highlighted in a report by the Naga Republic², the absence of essential firefighting equipment, such as water hydrants and specialized fire trucks, poses a significant risk to both lives and properties in Dimapur. In light of these challenges, it is imperative to prioritize disaster preparedness efforts to mitigate the impact of potential calamities. By proactively planning and equipping ourselves to respond effectively to emergencies, we can safeguard our communities and minimize the devastating consequences of unforeseen disasters. During a recent fire incident in Nagaland, a person's life was saved thanks to prompt action. However, the lack of effective initiatives has resulted in ongoing economic and asset losses that have yet to be contained. While lives have been saved, the impact on disaster victims and underprivileged individuals continues to be felt. It is imperative that we address these challenges and work towards implementing sustainable solutions to prevent future tragedies and support those in need. In the bustling commercial center of Nagaland, Dimapur, there were more than 50 fire-related incidents that tragically resulted in the loss of 6 lives even in the year 2023. While this number represents a decrease compared to previous years when incidents exceeded 60, the impact remains substantial. The most significant property loss was reported at Lake View Colony, totaling 2 Crores, followed by District Hospital with losses amounting to 1 Crore. It is imperative that measures be taken to prevent such devastating incidents in the future and ensure the safety and security of the residents of Dimapur³. The number of fire-related incidents continues to persist even in 2024⁴.

² *A day of fires in Dimapur and Kisama*. Retrieved November 12, 2021 from, <http://www.thenagarepublic.com/news/nagaland-news/a-day-of-fires-in-dimapur-and-kisama/>

³ *Dimapur experienced around 50 fire incidents in the year 2023*. Retrieved December 27, 2023, from https://www.instagram.com/nltvnews/reel/C1V_1pmPTNy/

⁴ For further readings- <https://nagalandpost.com/index.php/2024/05/09/massive-fire-breaks-out-at-burma-camp/>; <https://nagalandpost.com/index.php/2024/05/05/fire-incidents-suspected-arson-of-church-1-held/>; [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0yiCjfOW_Vo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0yiCjfOW_Vo;); https://www.instagram.com/themorungexpress/p/C6DV_kpvmhm/?img_index=1; <https://nagalandtribune.in/fire-breaks-out-at-kitsubozou-kohima-several-houses-and-vehicles-damaged/>

It is crucial to be prepared before a disaster strikes. Disaster preparedness involves taking proactive steps to minimize the impact of a disaster. Effective disaster preparedness can save lives, protect property, and help communities recover quickly. Whether it is an earthquake, fire, or any other type of disaster, the potential for chaos and panic is significant. Having a well-thought-out disaster plan in place can help reduce confusion and ensure that all family members know their roles. Regularly reviewing and updating disaster plans is essential to ensure everyone is prepared and on the same page. By following the plan, family members can support each other and ensure everyone's safety. It is the responsibility of every family to protect their loved ones, including young children, elderly relatives, and pets, during emergencies. Planning ahead is key and does not have to be time-consuming or expensive. Stocking up on essentials such as bottled water, nonperishable foods, medical supplies, and basic equipment is a wise investment. There is no excuse for delaying disaster preparedness when these supplies can be easily acquired at any time. While it is common to assume that government agencies and community organizations will provide immediate assistance during emergencies, the reality is that help may not arrive promptly. Being prepared allows families to sustain themselves for a few days until additional resources become available. Thus, disaster preparedness is a critical aspect of ensuring the safety and well-being of your family. By taking proactive measures and having a solid plan in place, you can minimize the impact of disasters and protect your loved ones effectively. It is essential to practice disaster preparedness through family drills, as everyone will eventually need to take action to ensure their safety. During a disaster, individuals often experience feelings of nervousness and stress, making it challenging to make quick and informed decisions. By engaging in disaster preparedness exercises, families can establish a plan of action and know how to respond in the event of a fire. This preparation provides the confidence that they will be able to effectively handle a disaster, having already acquired the necessary knowledge. Being well-prepared for inevitable disasters leads to a safer and more comfortable experience. The specific items needed will vary depending on the type of natural disaster, location, family composition, and even weather conditions.

Taking into consideration all of the aforementioned factors, a comprehensive survey was conducted to assess the level of preparedness of families with children in the Dimapur district. A total of 350 individuals participated in the survey. The results of the survey revealed that 94.3 percent of respondents indicated that their families consist of 1 to 6 members, including children aged 1 to 5. Furthermore, the survey found that 200 families reside in private homes, 100 families live in rented apartments, and the remaining families live in thatch/semi-houses. In terms of education, 140 respondents stated that none of their children attend school, 120 mentioned that only a few of their children attend school, and 90 reported that all of their children are enrolled in school. Surprisingly, 210 respondents indicated that their children who attend school have not been taught Disaster Management, while 90 were unsure, and only 50 confirmed that their children have received instruction in this area. When asked about their level of preparedness for a disaster, 160 respondents answered negatively, another 160 responded with uncertainty, and only 30 individuals claimed to be adequately

prepared. These findings underscore the importance of enhancing disaster preparedness education and resources for families with young children in the Dimapur district. Every individual, institution, and organisation should be aware of the fire department's emergency contact information and phone numbers. The phone number or numbers for your local fire and rescue services are known as fire emergency contacts. If we delay in conducting the fire department, the respond to a fire will be late. But according to the survey, only 110 respondents were aware of the Dimapur fire emergency number. As Chinese proverb says, "Better a thousand times careful, than one dead," it is very important to do what is needed, rather than sorry.

As previously mentioned, families impacted by emergency situations such as fires may find themselves in need of first aid and lacking access to essential resources until assistance arrives. In many cases, it can take one or more days for food, water, and medical assistance to reach those in need. In the event of a catastrophic event, individuals must be self-reliant and rely on the supplies they have on hand. To ensure preparedness for any emergency, it is recommended to acquire a 72-hour kit from Life Secure. However, according to a recent survey, 94.3% of respondents indicated that they do not have a 72-hour family disaster supplies kit at home. Additionally, 300 respondents stated that they do not have an emergency supplies kit for each family vehicle, with only 30 responding affirmatively and 20 expressing uncertainty. It is evident that a significant number of individuals are unprepared for potential emergencies. It is crucial to take proactive measures to safeguard oneself and loved ones in the face of unforeseen circumstances. Knowing CPR has the biggest benefit of saving lives, which is why it's critical to be prepared at all times. The first step in assisting your family is to understand the importance and benefits of knowing CPR but out of 350 respondents, only 20 respondents that at home all responsible family members are current in CPR.

According to the survey conducted, it was found that none of the respondents have operational smoke detectors on every level of their home, including outside bedrooms and the kitchen. Additionally, only 10 respondents indicated that they have at least one charged ABC fire extinguisher at home. It is concerning that many individuals do not recognize the importance of having fire extinguishers readily available in case of emergencies. It is a common misconception that fires will never happen in one's home, leading to a lack of preparedness. However, it is crucial to understand that having fire extinguishers on hand can potentially prevent costly fire damage and save lives. This fire safety equipment can play a significant role in preventing small incidents from escalating into deadly fires. It is alarming to note that 240 respondents admitted to not knowing how to use a fire extinguisher, while 90 respondents indicated that they do not know how to use one and 20 were unsure. Furthermore, 340 respondents stated that they have not received any training on how to use a fire extinguisher. It is imperative for individuals to educate themselves on fire safety measures and ensure that they are equipped with the necessary tools to handle emergencies effectively. Proper training on how to use a fire extinguisher can make a significant difference in protecting oneself and loved ones from potential fire hazards. In the event of a disaster of any kind, every responsible family member may need to understand how to turn off utilities to protect the family and property. In this case, the survey shows that 180

responded yes to that all responsible family members know when and how to turn off all utilities, whereas 90 responded no and another 90 respondents said maybe.

Family records are crucial for preserving. However, according to the survey of 350 respondents, only 150 individuals are prepared to safeguard their most important family records. On the other hand, 160 respondents are not ready to protect their family records, while 40 respondents are unsure of what steps to take. It is essential for individuals to prioritize the protection of their family records to ensure that they are preserved for future generations.

It is imperative to practice a family fire escape drill as every life is valuable. Understanding fire safety measures is crucial at every stage of life. Families, especially children, should regularly conduct home fire drills to ensure they are familiar with the escape plan and are prepared in the event of a fire. Despite the importance of these drills, a recent survey revealed that only 1% of respondents have actually conducted a family fire escape drill. Additionally, 320 respondents admitted that their families have not discussed a designated meeting place outside in case of a fire, with only 30 respondents confirming that they have. Out of the 350 respondents surveyed, 170 stated that they do not have established escape routes in the event of a fire, while 100 said they do and 70 were unsure. It is evident that there is a significant gap in fire safety preparedness among families. It is crucial for families to prioritize fire safety measures and conduct regular drills to ensure the safety of all members.

Conclusion

The paper highlights the critical importance of preparedness efforts in mitigating the impact of calamities, with a specific focus on fire incidents in the busy commercial center of Dimapur, Nagaland. It emphasizes the necessity of proactive planning, effective response measures, and sustainable solutions to prevent future tragedies and support the community. Recent fire incidents in Nagaland have resulted in significant economic and asset losses, despite some lives being saved due to prompt action. Dimapur has witnessed over 50 fire-related incidents in 2023, leading to substantial property losses and the tragic loss of 6 lives. The lack of effective initiatives has resulted in ongoing economic losses in Dimapur, particularly in areas like Lake View Colony and District Hospital. The impact on disaster victims and underprivileged individuals continues to be felt, highlighting the need for sustainable solutions. Improved preparedness among residents in Dimapur is crucial, highlighting the importance of awareness, training, and readiness to respond effectively to fire incidents. Survey results have revealed gaps in knowledge and preparedness, such as a lack of training on using fire extinguishers and awareness of emergency contact information. It is imperative for individuals to educate themselves on fire safety measures, equip themselves with necessary tools, and prioritize the protection of family records. The implementation of family fire escape drills, understanding utility shut-off procedures, and acquiring emergency supplies kits are recommended to enhance preparedness. The paper stresses the critical need for proactive measures to address the persistent threat of fire incidents in Dimapur,

emphasizing the importance of community awareness, training, and preparedness to minimize losses and safeguard lives. Collaborative efforts are essential to enhance resilience, prevent disasters, and ensure the safety and security of residents in the face of potential emergencies.

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