



Date: 04/06/2026

FIRE ACCIDENTS IN INDIA

SYLLABUS:

GS 3 > Disaster Management >> Man-made Disasters

REFERENCE NEWS:

A massive fire broke out on **3 June 2026** in a multi-storey building in **Malviya Nagar, South Delhi**. The blaze is suspected to have originated in the restaurant before rapidly spreading through the building.

FIRE ACCIDENTS IN INDIA:

Fire accidents have emerged as one of India's most persistent urban and industrial safety challenges. Despite the existence of the National Building Code (NBC), State Fire Acts, and disaster management frameworks, India continues to witness frequent fire incidents causing substantial loss of life, property, and economic assets. Recent tragedies indicate that fire safety remains characterized by weak enforcement, inadequate preparedness, and rapid urbanization outpacing safety infrastructure.

- According to the **NCRB's Accidental Deaths and Suicides in India (ADSI) Report 2022, 7,435 people were killed in more than 7,500 fire accidents** across the country.
- Broader estimates indicate that India experiences nearly **1.6 lakh fire incidents annually**, resulting in **over 27,000 deaths every year**, making fire one of the leading causes of accidental fatalities.
- **Fire accidents are increasingly occurring in commercial and public establishments rather than being confined to residential areas.**
- Fire-related economic losses are estimated to exceed **₹1,000 crore annually**, affecting industries, supply chains, and employment.
- **Fire service capacity remains inadequate in many parts of the country.** Fire services continue to face shortages of personnel, equipment, fire stations, and water infrastructure.

Incident	Year	Deaths	Key Issue
Goa Nightclub Fire	2026	25	Fire safety violations
Delhi Hotel-Restaurant Fire	2026	21	Emergency preparedness failure
Rajkot Game Zone Fire	2024	27	No valid Fire NOC

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Incident	Year	Deaths	Key Issue
Mundka Building Fire	2022	27	Electrical fault, single exit
Bhandara Hospital Fire	2021	10 infants	Hospital safety lapses
Surat Coaching Centre Fire	2019	22	Blocked exits
Anaj Mandi Fire	2019	43	Congestion and illegal use
Kamala Mills Fire	2017	14	Unauthorized structures
AMRI Hospital Fire	2011	94	Poor emergency response
Kumbakonam School Fire	2004	94	Unsafe school infrastructure

REASONS FOR FIRE ACCIDENTS IN INDIA:

Weak Enforcement of Fire Safety Regulations is one of the biggest causes of recurring fire accidents in India.

- Many buildings continue to operate without valid Fire No-Objection Certificates (NOCs), periodic safety audits, or compliance with prescribed fire-safety standards.
- Safety inspections are often irregular, allowing hazardous establishments to function unchecked.
 - The **Rajkot Game Zone Fire (2024)** occurred in a facility operating without a valid fire NOC and structural stability certificate, resulting in 27 deaths.
 - The recent **Goa nightclub fire (2026)** and **Delhi hotel fire (2026)** have again highlighted failures in enforcement and monitoring.

Electrical faults remain the leading cause of fire accidents across the country.

- Short circuits, overloaded electrical systems, aging wiring, illegal connections, and poor maintenance account for a majority of urban fire incidents. Rapid urbanization and increasing dependence on electrical appliances have further increased risks.
 - Experts estimate that nearly **70% of urban fires originate from electrical failures**.
 - The **Mundka Building Fire (Delhi, 2022)** and the **Hyderabad residential fire** were linked to electrical faults and equipment failures.

Illegal constructions and violations of building norms significantly increase fire vulnerability.

- Unauthorized modifications, high rises, often block ventilation, emergency exits, and firefighting access. Many buildings violate setback requirements and occupancy norms.
 - The **Surat Coaching Centre Fire (2019)** trapped students because illegal rooftop structures obstructed evacuation routes.

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- Unauthorized rooftop restaurants contributed to the rapid spread of the **Kamala Mills Fire (Mumbai, 2017)**.

Blocked exits and inadequate evacuation routes frequently convert manageable fires into mass-casualty disasters.

- Emergency exits, staircases, corridors, and escape routes are often encroached upon or used for storage. During fires, smoke and panic quickly trap occupants who have no alternative means of escape.
 - In the **Kolkata hotel fire**, several victims died from asphyxiation after becoming trapped in smoke-filled stairwells.

Congested urban planning and narrow roads delay firefighting operations.

- Unplanned urban growth, overcrowded settlements, and narrow lanes often prevent fire tenders from reaching affected sites quickly. High population density accelerates the spread of fire between adjacent structures.
- New residential complexes, malls, and commercial centres often emerge faster than supporting safety infrastructure. The National Institute of Disaster Management has noted that many urban areas remain inadequately prepared for modern fire risks.
 - The **Anaj Mandi Fire (Delhi, 2019)** exposed how congested urban environments can severely hamper rescue operations and increase fatalities.

Poor maintenance of buildings and fire-fighting equipment contributes significantly to fire incidents.

- Fire alarms, sprinklers, extinguishers, smoke detectors, and hydrants often remain non-functional due to poor maintenance. Many establishments install safety equipment merely to obtain licences but fail to maintain them thereafter.
- Investigations into several commercial and hospital fires have revealed malfunctioning safety systems.
 - The **AMRI Hospital Fire (Kolkata, 2011)** killed 94 people and remains one of India's deadliest hospital fires.
 - The **Bhandara District Hospital Fire (Maharashtra, 2021)** killed 10 infants and raised concerns about safety audits in healthcare facilities.

Unsafe storage and handling of hazardous materials frequently trigger industrial and warehouse fires.

- Chemicals, fuels, explosives, fireworks, and combustible materials are often stored without adherence to safety protocols. Inadequate monitoring and illegal storage practices increase the likelihood of explosions and large-scale fires.
- **Industrial negligence and poor workplace safety standards increase fire risks.**
 - The **Gujarat fireworks warehouse explosion** killed 21 people after highly combustible materials were reportedly stored without proper authorization.

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Lack of public awareness and emergency preparedness contributes to higher casualties.

- Occupants are often unaware of evacuation procedures, emergency exits, and fire-response protocols.
- Fire drills are rarely conducted in many schools, offices, hospitals, and commercial establishments. Panic and confusion during emergencies often result in avoidable deaths.
- The repeated occurrence of casualties due to stampedes and delayed evacuation reflects poor preparedness.

Climate change and extreme heat are emerging as new contributors to fire incidents.

- Rising temperatures increase electricity consumption, placing additional stress on power infrastructure. Heat waves increase the probability of short circuits, transformer failures, and air-conditioner-related fires.
- Climate change is also increasing fire risks in agricultural lands, peri-urban areas, and forests.

New technologies and emerging infrastructure have created new categories of fire risk.

- Electric vehicles, lithium-ion batteries, metro systems, data centres, multi-level parking facilities, and piped gas networks pose unique fire challenges.
- EV battery fires are particularly difficult to extinguish and require specialized firefighting techniques.
- Concerns regarding lithium-ion battery fires led to revisions in BIS safety standards in 2023.

MEASURES TO BUILD SAFER AND FIRE-RESILIENT INFRASTRUCTURE IN INDIA:

India needs to move from a **reactive firefighting approach to a proactive fire-risk management approach**. Most fire disasters are preventable and require stronger regulations, safer infrastructure, technological integration, institutional accountability, and public participation.

- **Make Fire Safety Compliance Non-Negotiable:** Fire safety regulations should be treated as mandatory public-safety requirements rather than mere licensing formalities.
 - Make compliance with **NBC 2016 Part IV (Fire & Life Safety)** compulsory across all states. Link occupancy certificates and business licences to annual fire-safety compliance.
 - Introduce automatic closure of establishments operating without valid Fire NOCs.
 - After the **Rajkot Game Zone Fire (2024)**, Gujarat ordered statewide inspections of entertainment venues and stricter compliance audits.
- **Introduce Mandatory Third-Party Fire Audits:** Independent fire-safety audits should replace the current system of irregular inspections.
 - Annual third-party audits for hotels, hospitals, malls, schools, factories, high-rise buildings, digital publication of audit reports, risk-based grading system for buildings.
 - Countries such as **Singapore** and **Australia** require periodic independent fire-safety certification for high-risk occupancies.
- **Modernize Building Design for Fire Safety:** Fire safety should be incorporated at the design stage rather than retrofitted later.

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- Mandatory fire-resistant construction materials. Fire compartmentalization to prevent spread. Smoke-proof stairwells. Multiple emergency exits. Fire lifts in high-rise buildings.
- **Strengthen Safety in Basements and Underground Structures:** Basements have become major fire traps due to poor ventilation and illegal commercial use.
 - Mandatory smoke extraction systems, automatic sprinkler systems, mechanical ventilation, two independent exits and ban commercial activities in unsafe basements.
- **Upgrade Electrical Infrastructure:** Since electrical faults cause a majority of urban fires, electrical safety must become a national priority.
 - Mandatory electrical audits every 3 years. Smart circuit breakers. Thermal imaging inspections. Replacement of outdated wiring. Overload monitoring systems.
 - Japan conducts regular electrical inspections for commercial buildings and high-density residential complexes.
- **Create Fire-Resilient Urban Planning:** Fire safety must become an integral component of urban planning.
 - Wider roads for fire-engine access. Dedicated emergency lanes. Hydrant networks in all urban local bodies. Fire stations within prescribed response distances.
- **Modernize Fire Services:** Fire services should be transformed into technologically advanced emergency-response agencies.
 - Increase fire stations and personnel. Establish rapid-response units. Procure aerial ladder platforms. Deploy compact fire tenders for narrow lanes.
 - **Bengaluru's rapid-intervention vehicles** and **Mumbai's specialized high-rise firefighting units** offer useful models.
- **Leverage Technology and Artificial Intelligence:** Technology should be used for prevention, detection, and response.
 - AI-based fire prediction systems. Smart smoke and heat sensors. GIS mapping of fire hydrants. Drone-assisted firefighting. Thermal imaging cameras.
 - Delhi and Mumbai have initiated pilot projects using AI-based heat mapping and surveillance systems for early detection.
- **Establish a Unified Digital Fire Safety Platform:** All regulatory approvals should be integrated digitally
 - Create a national dashboard linking: Building approvals, fire NOCs, occupancy certificates, electrical safety clearances, structural stability certificates.
- **Strengthen Accountability and Liability:** Negligence should attract stringent penalties. Criminal liability for owners violating fire norms, accountability of municipal officials approving unsafe structures.
- **Improve Industrial and Warehouse Safety:** Industrial facilities require sector-specific fire-risk management. Hazardous material inventory systems, automatic suppression systems, gas-leak detection mechanisms and fire-resistant storage facilities.
 - The **Process Safety Management (PSM)** framework used internationally can be adapted for Indian industries.
- **Institutional Reforms and Governance Improvements:** Fire safety governance should be standardized nationwide. Enact a comprehensive Fire Safety Act in all states. Adopt the Model

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Fire and Emergency Services Bill. Update NDMA Fire Service Guidelines periodically. Establish dedicated Fire Safety Regulatory Authorities.

KEY FIRE SAFETY REGULATIONS IN INDIA

National Building Code (NBC) 2016: The code, formulated by the **Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS)**, is the primary framework governing fire safety in buildings across India.

- Part IV of the Code prescribes standards relating to fire prevention and protection, building design and construction, fire-resistant materials, means of escape and emergency exits, fire detection and alarm systems, sprinklers, hydrants, and firefighting installations.
- It applies to residential, commercial, industrial, institutional, and high-rise buildings.
- Although comprehensive, the NBC becomes legally enforceable only when adopted by States and Urban Local Bodies through local bye-laws.

Model Building Bye-Laws (MBBL), 2016: Issued by the **Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs (MoHUA)** to guide States and Urban Local Bodies in updating building regulations. Mandates use of fire-resistant construction materials, installation of fire alarms and detection systems, adequate ventilation and natural lighting, provision of emergency exits and firefighting equipment. Aims to ensure uniformity in fire-safety standards across India.

State Fire Prevention and Fire Safety Acts:

- Fire services are a **State Subject** under the Constitution and are listed as a municipal function under the **12th Schedule (Article 243W)**.
- Accordingly, most States have enacted their own Fire Prevention and Fire Safety Acts.
- These laws generally provide for Fire No-Objection Certificates (Fire NOCs), inspection of buildings, enforcement of fire-safety norms, penalties for non-compliance and powers of Fire Departments.
- Delhi Fire Service Act, Maharashtra Fire Prevention and Life Safety Measures Act, Gujarat Fire Prevention and Life Safety Measures Act.

Model Bill for Fire and Emergency Services, 2019: Prepared by the Ministry of Home Affairs. Provides a model legal framework for States to modernize fire and emergency services. Seeks to standardize fire-service administration, strengthen fire prevention mechanisms.

Fire No-Objection Certificate (Fire NOC) System: Certain categories of buildings must obtain a Fire NOC before commencing operations. Applicable to high-rise buildings, hospitals, hotels, malls, educational institutions and industrial establishments.

National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) Guidelines: The NDMA has issued detailed guidelines on fire safety in Homes, Schools, Hospitals, Commercial establishments, Industrial facilities. Key recommendations include establishing

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dedicated Fire Acts in States, strengthening fire-service infrastructure, expanding fire stations, capacity building and training and community awareness and preparedness.

Scheme for Expansion and Modernization of Fire Services in States (2023–26): Launched following the **15th Finance Commission's recommendation of ₹5,000 crore** for strengthening fire services.

Hospital Fire Safety Guidelines (2020): Issued by the Ministry of Health and Family Welfare after several hospital fire incidents.

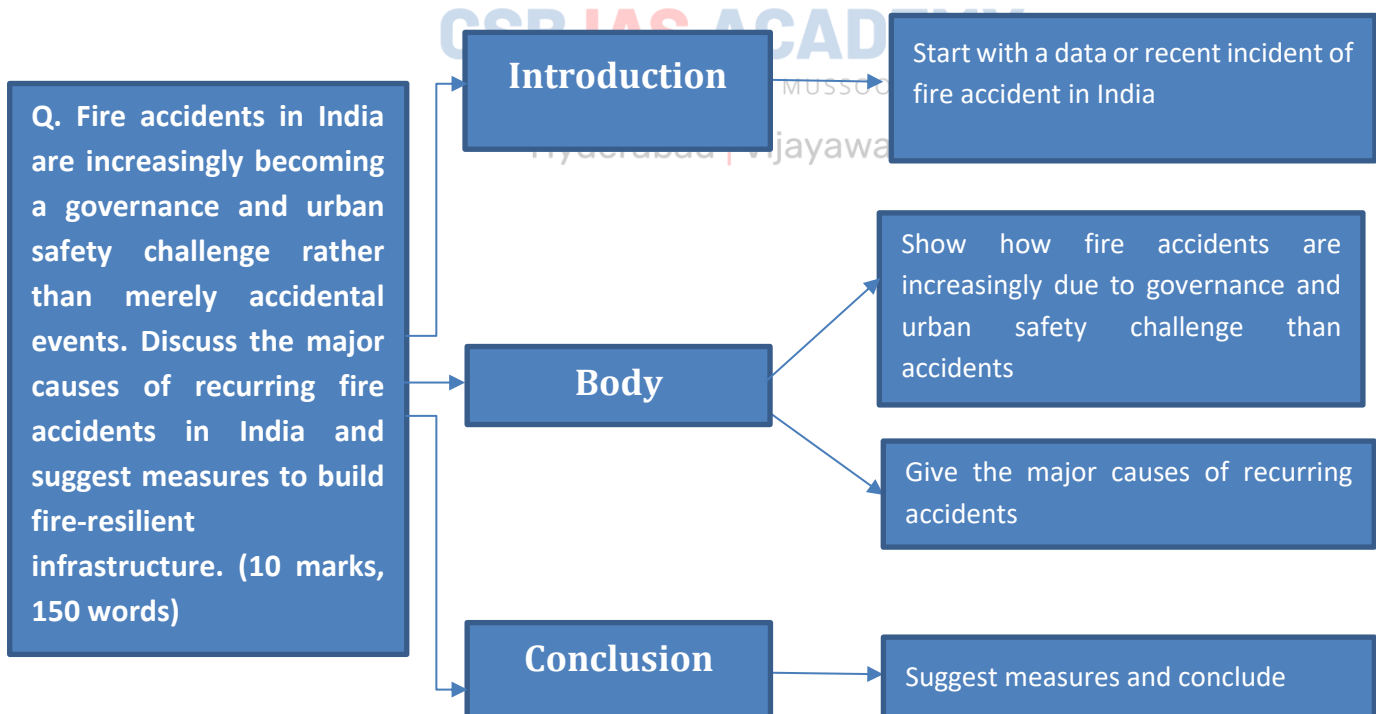
Occupational Safety, Health and Working Conditions (OSHC) Code, 2020: Provides safety standards for factories and workplaces. Requires employers to maintain fire-prevention measures.

Bureau of Indian Standards (BIS) Fire Safety Standards: BIS prescribes technical standards for fire-resistant materials, fire extinguishers, sprinkler systems, smoke detectors, electrical installations, Lithium-ion batteries and EV safety. These standards support the implementation of NBC provisions.

PRACTICE QUESTION:

Q. Fire accidents in India are increasingly becoming a governance and urban safety challenge rather than merely accidental events. Discuss the major causes of recurring fire accidents in India and suggest measures to build fire-resilient infrastructure. (10 marks, 150 words)

APPROACH:



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MODEL ANSWER:

Recent incidents such as the **Delhi Hotel-Restaurant Fire (2026)**, **Goa Nightclub Fire (2026)** and **Rajkot Game Zone Fire (2024)** highlight the growing challenge of fire safety in India. According to NCRB data, over **7,435 people died in more than 7,500 fire accidents in 2022**, while India records nearly **1.6 lakh fire incidents annually**.

Fire accidents are increasingly a governance and urban safety challenge because:

- Most major fires occur despite the existence of the National Building Code and State Fire Safety Acts, indicating failures in enforcement rather than absence of regulations.
- Many commercial establishments continue to operate without valid Fire NOCs, as seen in the **Rajkot Game Zone Fire (2024)**.
- Illegal constructions and unauthorized structural modifications often block evacuation routes, as witnessed in the **Surat Coaching Centre Fire (2019)** and **Kamala Mills Fire (2017)**.
- Congested urban planning and narrow roads delay firefighting operations, as exposed by the **Anaj Mandi Fire (2019)**.
- Poor maintenance of fire alarms, sprinklers and hydrants contributes to large-scale casualties, as seen in the **AMRI Hospital Fire (2011)**.
- Inadequate institutional capacity, including shortage of fire stations, equipment and trained personnel, weakens emergency response.
- Lack of periodic inspections, accountability and coordination among agencies allows safety violations to persist unchecked.

Major causes of recurring fire accidents:

- Electrical faults caused by overloaded circuits, faulty wiring and poor maintenance account for nearly 70% of urban fires.
- Weak enforcement of fire-safety regulations enables hazardous establishments to continue operations.
- Illegal constructions and violations of building norms obstruct ventilation and emergency exits.
- Blocked staircases and encroached escape routes convert manageable fires into mass-casualty disasters.
- Unsafe storage and handling of hazardous chemicals and combustible materials trigger industrial fires.
- Lack of public awareness, fire drills and emergency preparedness increases fatalities during evacuations.
- Climate change, heatwaves and emerging risks from EV batteries, data centres and modern infrastructure are creating new fire hazards.

Measures to build fire-resilient infrastructure:

- Make compliance with **NBC 2016 Part IV** mandatory across all States and Urban Local Bodies.
- Introduce compulsory annual third-party fire-safety audits for high-risk buildings.
- Upgrade electrical infrastructure through periodic electrical audits and smart monitoring systems.

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- Integrate fire safety into urban planning through wider roads, hydrant networks and dedicated emergency access corridors.
- Modernize fire services with AI-based detection systems, drones, thermal imaging cameras and rapid-response units.
- Strengthen accountability by imposing strict penalties on violators and fixing responsibility on regulatory authorities for negligence.

Fire disasters in India are largely preventable and stem from regulatory lapses, unsafe urbanization and poor preparedness. A shift from **reactive firefighting to proactive fire-risk management**, supported by technology, compliance and accountability, is essential for creating fire-resilient cities and protecting lives.



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