

REDUCING LOSSES

FIRE EXTINGUISHERS IN ALL HOUSES?

Fire and Rescue Dept drawing up plans to introduce legal provision

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EVERY home in the country may be required to be equipped with a fire extinguisher in the near future.

The Fire and Rescue Department is in the midst of drawing up plans to introduce this legal provision, which currently only exists in some state laws, at the federal level.

Once passed, those who purchased houses from 2012 could ask from their housing developers for a fire extinguishing unit. Others would need to buy it themselves.

Currently, the provision on this is under the Fire Safety for Buildings clause of the Uniform Building By-Laws (UBBL) 2012, a state bylaw which has been gazetted only in Sabah, Selangor, Terengganu and Penang. Sarawak has its own building ordinance.

However, it is understood that these states had not fully enforced the ruling.

When brought to the federal level, the Fire Safety for Buildings provision would likely be parked under the Fire Service Act 1988. All residential premises below 18m in height built from 2012 will be compelled to have at least one fire extinguisher.

The proposed law will also require all residential buildings constructed after 2012 with heights exceeding 30m, or 10 floors, to be equipped with a fire detector, aside from other fire-fighting equipment, like a wet riser and dry riser.

The spirit of this requirement to be made law, said Fire and Rescue Department director-general Datuk Wan Mohd Nor Ibrahim, was to allow the public a better chance of survival and minimise losses in the event of a fire.

Wan Mohd Nor said under the current UBBL provision, a state must first gazette the bylaw, which was amended in 2012, for the law to be enforced.

"The UBBL must be gazetted by the state for us to enforce it... The problem now is, some states have not gazetted the amended



Those who purchase houses from 2012 in states that gazette the Uniform Building By-Laws 2012 can request for a fire extinguishing unit from their housing developers. FILE PIC

spreading or douse it immediately.

He also tied this to statistics, which showed that only about 45 per cent of the time do fire engines reach the scene of a fire in under 10 minutes from the time the station received a distress call.

Determined to reduce the losses annually to fire, Wan Mohd Nor said the department had been striving to improve its response time of below 10 minutes to 60 per cent.

This, he said, would require the department to have more fire stations, especially in strategic locations.

"There is still a lot more to do to improve public awareness on fire safety aspects and this has always been our focus.

"We hope to reduce losses by reaching the scene as fast as possible. For this to happen, we will need more fire stations, especially in certain locations."

There are 284 fire stations nationwide and the department is

targeting to have at least 300 stations in the next few years before the number is increased gradually.

Wan Mohd Nor also touched on the Fire Precautions Act used abroad, which he said would help address the outdated "Fire Safety Codes for Building Structures".

"Malaysia has experienced rapid development and we can see many unique structures, including new airports, shopping centres and mixed developments, built with new concepts and designs.

"The existing Fire Safety Codes, which are also parked under the UBBL, are not applicable to these structures... so, the Fire Precautions Act, which has a general provision, will allow the director-general to come out with guidelines or regulations to address issues," he added.

The latest data from the Fire and Rescue Department showed that in the first six months of the year alone, the country lost about RM2 billion to fire.

Year 2015, however, was the worst in recent history, with total losses amounting to RM4.3 billion from more than 40,000 fire cases nationwide.

Wan Mohd Nor, in an exclusive interview with the *New Straits Times*, said the amount of losses due to fire was actually far greater than those recorded in dollars and cents.

This, he said, was because the value recorded was just a reflection of the total sum of direct losses involving assets that went up in smoke, without taking into account indirect losses.

"This is a huge loss, especially to our economy and we have to bear in mind that the amount of losses that the country suffers is more than what is on paper.

"When a factory is razed, for example, the business will be forced to shut down, hundreds of people will lose their jobs and people may be killed or injured. All these indirect losses are estimates that we do not put in our report," he said.