

LEADER

### Stop creating deathtraps

Remember, it may be your home or loved ones that needs saving

THE Fire and Rescue Department (FRD) is going all out to keep us and our premises safe. But there is one thing that stands in its way. And that is our attitude on fire safety. Take, for instance, gated premises in the country. Especially the ones that have decided on gating as an afterthought, adding guardhouses and boom gates as they go along. They did not spare a thought for allowing access to fire engines and other emergency vehicles. What seemed to have been in their minds is to prevent people from entering the premises rather than allowing access. It is all right if terminals are denied access, but fire engines?

Of course, they did not purposely intend to keep firefighters away, but it reflects the importance that the people who manage the premises give to fire safety. And that, to put it bluntly, is a general Malaysian disposition. We are quick to blame the FRD when fires get out of control, but we hardly take steps to help ourselves. The law clearly says that the entrances and exits must not be less than 4m in width, and must allow vehicles measuring 4.6m high to pass through. The reality is otherwise.

And that is not all. We place all forms of hurdles along the path of fire engines. The laments of the department are many, and inconsiderate parking is one of them. In many housing areas, cars are parked on both sides of the road, denying access to fire engines. In the experience of the FRD, this is more frequently evidenced in high-cost apartments, although other housing areas are not free from blame. Despite numerous warnings, the inconsiderate practice of parking on both sides of narrow, road continues unabated. We rather die in fires than let our parking spots. Last the city dwellers snigger, it happens in the Golden Triangle, too. All manner of vehicles — tourist buses, taxis and cars — double and triple park, blocking entrances even to the national icon, the Petronas Twin Towers. It is little wonder that the firefighters are able to be at the scene of a fire within 10 minutes of a distress call 45 per cent of the time only. Malaysia has lost 330 lives and RM3.3 billion to fires in just three years, and yet, we are slow to learn.

IGNORANT ATTITUDE

## FIRE ENGINES FACE OBSTACLES NEAR HOMES

Indiscriminate parking, inaccessible entrances to housing areas hinder firefighting efforts

ALIZA SHAH  
KUALA LUMPUR  
news@nst.com.my

ANY neighbourhoods are exposed to serious fire safety risks simply because there is no way help could reach them fast enough in an emergency. Residents in many gated and guarded housing areas might not even realise that their boom gates, guardhouse and obstructed roads, which were put in place to barge in front of their homes, had turned their neighbourhoods into a deathtrap.

The Fire and Rescue Department said today that the burning issues it faced included having their access blocked, hindering firemen's effort to respond to distress calls.

Its director general, Daruk Wira Wan Mohd Nor Wan Ibrahim, told the *New Sunday Times* that this problem was prevalent in highly populated low-cost housing areas.

He said, many fall to do so because residents do not pay their maintenance fees.



gated communities.

"It is also frustrating for us when we find gates in gated communities locked and the security guards refusing to let us enter unless we answer a host of questions," he said, adding that there were times they had come close to breaking the locks to reach a reported fire.

Zaidi reminded residents' associations that making entry routes inaccessible and hindering firefighters from carrying out their duties is an offence under the Fire Services Act 1988 (FSA).

"Can you imagine people from 200 households trying to evacuate the housing area through that one exit?"

"Normally, when we see this happening, we will engage the residents' association chairman and issue a fire-hazard abatement notice."

He added that the person could also be liable for a further fine of RM100 each day the offence continued after a conviction.



The guardhouse gantries of gated residential premises must be more than 4m wide and allow vehicles up to 4.6m high to pass through.

### Fire department will remove obstructions

KUALA LUMPUR: The Fire and Rescue Department can, and will, remove illegal structures and "blockades" that stall and prevent firefighting efforts.

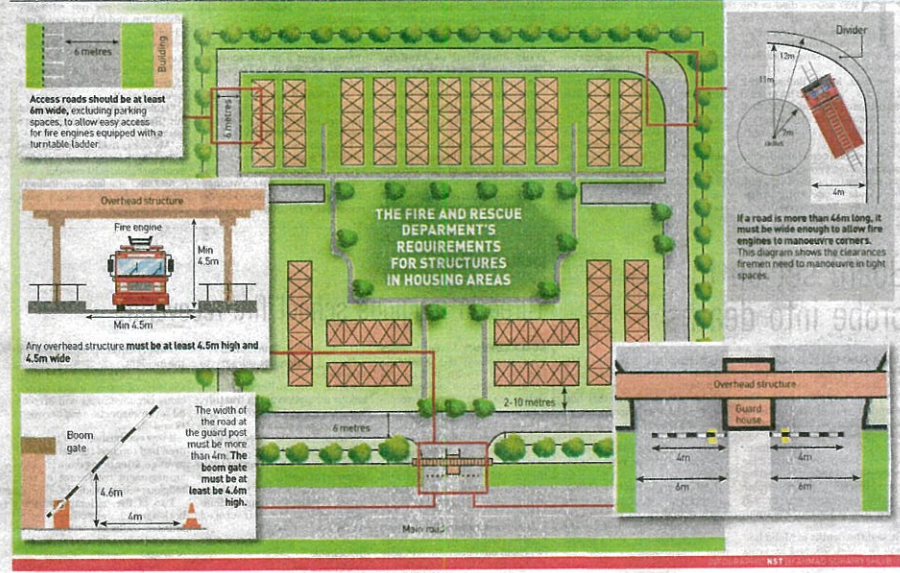
Assistant fire commissioner Wan Mohd Zaidi Wan Isa said these hindrances included boom gates and guard posts that were built against the limits underlined by the Uniform Building By-laws (UBBL).

The act makes those who fail to comply with the underlined requirements punishable with a fine not exceeding RM5,000, or imprisonment for a term not exceeding three years or both.

The offender could also be liable to a further fine of RM100 for each day the offence continued after a conviction.

Wan Mohd Zaidi said developers who failed to comply with provisions under the UBBL would also risk having their projects declared "unfit for occupancy".

Enforcing the FSA in this case, he said, would not solve the problem, especially in high-rise residential areas.



Page 1 pic: A fire engine from the Sungai Pinang fire station in Klang facing difficulties while responding to an emergency because cars were parked on both sides of the access road.