

‘OVERWORKED’ FIRE OFFICERS FUME OVER 30% VACANT POSTS

SUJIT MAHAMULKAR



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With 29 of the 98 scheduled posts in the fire brigade lying unfilled, the officials claim that it is impossible for them to conduct tasks such as conducting fire safety audits, in addition to their fire-fighting duties

WHILE the city’s fire safety system continues to be a source of widespread concern, officials of the Fire Brigade claim they are struggling to tackle their workload, thanks to a grinding shortage of staff.

At present, there are a total of 98 scheduled posts in the Fire Brigade department, of which over 25 per cent, that is 29 posts, have been lying vacant for over a year.

Apart from dispensing their regular fire- fighting duties on call, the officials have additional tasks on their plate, which include conducting fire audits to check safety measures in private buildings, malls, multiplexes, and hospitals as well as civic school buildings.

The officers claim that these extra duties are causing them to be overworked, and their plight could easily be alleviated if the vacant posts were filled up.

In order to avoid fire accidents in high- rises, the Maharashtra Fire Prevention and Life Safety Measures Act, 2006 makes it compulsory for new buildings to have fire- fighting equipment such as fire extinguishers in place, as well as a bi- annual certification from a licenced agency regarding upgrades made to the system.

There is a similar staff crunch in the 33 fire stations across the city, with about 2,200 firemen on their rolls — over 300 posts are lying vacant.

“ According to the norm, every fire station officer has to inspect at least four high- rise buildings in a month and submit the detailed report to superior staff. We cannot complete all this in our present duty hours,” said a fire officer, on condition of anonymity.

Recently, the fire department promoted five divisional fire officers to the post of deputy chief fire officer.

However, no promotions were granted to officers in the lower rungs. This too has irked them.

“ If seniors made their way up, they should also fill posts below them, so that work could progress smoothly,” said a fire official.

He added that the island city area from south Mumbai to Mahim- Sion has only one divisional fire officer. “ Whenever he goes on leave, two other officers from the suburban section have to stand in for him, at the cost of hampering their own duties,” he said.

Meanwhile, the fire brigade officers union has also been speaking out about the staff shortage. “ We wrote to the chief fire officer about the vacant posts and demanded that a meeting be held to discuss the issue,” said Sanjay Kamble, general secretary of the Hindustan Mazdoor Sangh.

S V Joshi, chief fire officer said that the vacant posts are in the process of being filled in.

“ We will publish an advertisement soon and will conduct six months of training for them,” said Joshi.

VACANCY WARCH			
POST	SCHEDULED	FILLED	VACANT
Deputy fire officer	7	5	2
Divisional fire officer	11	3	8
Assistant divisional fire officer	35	18	17
Station oficer	64	45	19
Total scheduled posts	98	69	29

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