



A Decade of Major Market & Commercial Fires (2016–2026) KARACHI

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Gul Plaza Fire August 2016

Plot No. 32, Survey Sheet No. PR-1, Preedy Quarters,
Muhammad Ali Jinnah Road, Saddar

Approx 1.68 to 1.75 acres.

On August 7, 2016, a major fire broke out at Gul Plaza on M.A. Jinnah Road, Karachi. Here is the short summary:

- **The Incident:** The fire started around 10:00 AM on a Sunday. It began on the upper floors (reports cited the 2nd and 9th floors) and spread through the building's central electrical wiring.
- **The Cause:** Officials attributed the blaze to a short circuit, likely caused by moisture from recent monsoon rains affecting the building's old wiring.
- **The Damage:** * 25 to 30 shops were completely destroyed.
- Inventory consisting of garments, plastics, and electronics was reduced to ashes.
- A mosque on the 9th floor was partially damaged.
- **Casualties:** There were no deaths or serious injuries because the market was closed for the Sunday holiday.



Chawla Market Fire October 10, 2021

Block 1, Nazimabad No. 1
Approx 2 to 3 acres.

On October 10, 2021, a massive fire broke out at Chawla Market in the Nazimabad No. 1 area of Karachi. Here is the short breakdown:

- **The Incident:** The blaze started in the early hours of Sunday morning (around 2:30 AM). Because the market was closed and filled with flammable materials, the fire spread rapidly before it was noticed.
- **The Cause:** Initial investigations pointed to a short circuit in the market's aging electrical network.
- **The Damage:** * 15 to 20 shops were completely gutted.
 - The inventory mostly garments, hosiery, and cloth was entirely destroyed, leading to heavy financial losses for local traders.
 - Firefighters faced significant difficulty reaching the site due to the narrow streets and congested nature of the Nazimabad area.
- **Casualties:** There were no fatalities or injuries, as the fire occurred while the market was empty.



Chase Up Departmental Store Fire June 1, 2022

Plot No. 172-N, Block 3, PECHS
Approx 0.52 acres.

- **The Event:** On June 1, 2022, a fire erupted at approximately 11:00 AM in the basement of the Chase Up store. Because the basement was packed with stock and lacked ventilation, it became a "heat trap," taking over 45 hours and the help of the Pakistan Navy to fully extinguish.
- **The Damage:**
- **Inventory:** Millions of rupees worth of garments, plastics, and household goods were destroyed.
- **Structural:** The intense heat (which lasted for days) severely weakened the building's pillars. The SBCA declared the 15-story residential tower unsafe and uninhabitable, displacing over 170 families.
- **Casualties:** One person died (identified as a young man named Wasay, who was at the store for a job interview/duty) due to suffocation. Several firefighters also fell unconscious due to the thick toxic smoke.



Co-operative Market Fire (Saddar) 2022

Abdullah Haroon Road (opposite Regal Chowk), Saddar
Approx 1.2 to 1.5 acres.

- On November 14, 2021, a "Category-III" fire devastated the Co-operative Market in Saddar. Here is the short summary:
- **The Incident:** The fire started around 5:45 PM on a Sunday. It began on the ground floor and raged for over 6 hours before being contained by dozens of fire tenders.
- **The Cause:** Official investigations confirmed a short circuit as the primary cause, exacerbated by a total lack of internal fire safety systems.
- **The Damage:** * Nearly 500 to 600 shops were destroyed or severely damaged.
- As a major hub for imported fabrics and garments, the financial loss was estimated in the billions of rupees.
- **Casualties:** There were no fatalities since the market was closed for the Sunday holiday.



RJ Shopping Mall Fire

November 25, 2023

Plot No. B-1, Main Rashid Minhas Road, Block 10-A,
Gulshan-e-Iqbal (near Jauhar Mor)

Approx 1.0 to 1.25 acres.

- **The Incident:** The fire erupted at approximately 6:30 AM on a Saturday. It started on the 4th floor of the multi-story complex, which housed several 24/7 call centers and software firms.
- **The Cause:** A police inquiry concluded that the fire was sparked by a short circuit in a substandard wire inside a cafeteria on the 4th floor. The blaze spread rapidly through the false ceilings and combustible office materials.
- **The Damage:** The 4th and 5th floors were the most affected, with multiple call centers and offices completely gutted.
- The building was criticized for having no emergency exits, no fire safety systems, and sealed elevators, which trapped people inside.
- **Casualties:** Tragically, 11 people died and over 22 others were injured. Most victims were young call center employees who died of suffocation because the building had zero ventilation.



Rimpa Plaza Fires 2024

M.A. Jinnah Road (adjacent to Gul Plaza), Preedy Quarters,
Saddar

Approx 0.52 to 0.62 acres.

- **December 3, 2024 (Primary Incident):** * **What Happened:** A massive fire broke out around noon, starting on the 4th floor. Due to poor ventilation and the presence of highly flammable goods, it took firefighters over four hours to control.
- **The Damage:** The 4th and 5th floors were completely gutted, while the 6th and 7th floors were partially damaged. The building houses warehouses for auto parts, tires, and plastic goods, all of which fueled the blaze.
- **December 19, 2024 (Second Incident):**
- **What Happened:** Fire erupted again on the roof of the 2nd floor.
- **The Damage:** This was smaller but significant because it involved the reignition of rubber and scrap material left over from the December 3 fire.
- **Casualties:** Fortunately, no fatalities were reported in either 2024 incident, as occupants were successfully evacuated.



Empress / Nauman Plaza Fire December 2024

Noman Centre (also associated with the Ghariyali Building),
Preedy Street, near Empress Market, Saddar

Approx 0.18 to 0.20 acres.

- **The Incident:** The fire broke out on the 3rd floor of Noman Centre/Ghariyali Building near Empress Market. It quickly escalated, spreading to the 4th and 5th floors. The thick smoke made it difficult for people inside to escape.
- **The Response:** The Karachi Metropolitan Corporation (KMC) dispatched 5 fire tenders and a snorkel to reach the upper floors. Rangers and police cordoned off the busy Empress Market road to allow rescue teams access.
- **The Damage:** Several garment warehouses and shops on the upper floors were gutted.
- Multiple vehicles (including a rickshaw and cars) parked near the building were damaged by falling debris or heat.
- While the financial loss was heavy, the prompt response prevented the entire plaza from collapsing.
- **Casualties:** There were no fatalities. Firefighters successfully rescued 5 people who were trapped on the upper floors using a snorkel.



Furniture Market Fire (Gulistan-e-Johar)

Near Kamran Chowrangi, Gulistan-e-Johar (Block 15/16)

Approx 1.5 to 2 acres.

- **The Incident:** The blaze erupted late Monday night (December 30) and continued into the early hours of Tuesday. The fire was exceptionally intense, with towering flames and thick smoke visible from several kilometers away. It took six fire tenders several hours to bring the inferno under control.
- **The Cause:** While a formal investigation was launched, initial reports suggested the fire might have originated in nearby dry bushes or due to a short circuit, quickly spreading to the highly combustible wooden furniture and foam stored in the shops.
- **The Damage:** 30 to 35 shops were completely gutted.
- Millions of rupees worth of new and used furniture, upholstery, and raw timber were reduced to ashes.
- Some shopkeepers and residents managed to save a small portion of the merchandise by dragging it onto the road before the flames reached them.
- **Casualties:** Fortunately, there were no fatalities or injuries reported, as the fire occurred late at night when the market was closed.



Clifton Shopping Centre Fire

February 18, 2025

Glass Tower, Plot No. G-2, Main Khayaban-e-Iqbal (near Teen Talwar and the PSO Head Office), Clifton Block 8
Approx 0.25 to 0.31 acres.

- **The Incident:** The fire erupted in the "wee hours" of Tuesday morning, around 1:40 AM. It originated on the first floor and quickly spread due to the presence of flammable materials like blankets, sofa sets, and clothing.
- **The Cause:** Initial investigations by police and fire officials suggested an electrical short circuit in a warehouse within the building.
- **The Damage:** At least 30 shops and warehouses were completely gutted.
- Significant quantities of cell phones, electronic goods, blankets, and garments were destroyed, causing millions in losses.
- It took 12 fire tenders and approximately four hours to bring the blaze under control.
- **Casualties:** There were no fatalities. However, four people (one firefighter and three shopkeepers/staff) were treated for smoke inhalation and suffocation.



Millennium Mall Fire

June 2025

Plot No. 118, F-1, Main Rashid Minhas Road, Block 10-A,
Gulshan-e-Iqbal (near Jauhar Mor)

Approx 1.55 to 1.65 acres.

- **The Incident:** The fire was reported at approximately 3:50 AM on a Wednesday. It began in the mall's control and surveillance room on the 3rd floor and quickly spread to the rooftop, where chillers and heavy machinery were kept, before engulfing the upper floors.
- **The Cause:** Officials attributed the blaze to a short circuit in the control room. The fire intensified because the mall's internal fire suppression systems were non-functional and there was a significant lack of ventilation.
- **The Damage:** Between 250 and 500 shops were reported as completely gutted or severely damaged.
- The 3rd and 4th floors (housing corporate offices and garment shops) were the most affected.
- Financial losses were estimated in the billions of rupees, though a notable point in reports was the discovery of several copies of the Holy Quran that remained miraculously untouched by the fire.
- **Casualties:** Fortunately, no one was killed or injured as the fire occurred during the early morning hours when the mall was empty of shoppers.



Aamir Electronics Market Fire

June 18, 2025

Sohrab Katrak Road (near Regal Chowk), Saddar

Approx 0.15 to 0.18 acres.

- **The Incident:** The fire erupted on a Monday afternoon (June 16) in a densely packed lane of the electronics hub. It quickly escalated into a "Category-III" blaze, engulfing multiple floors of a commercial-cum-residential building.
- **The Cause:** Initial reports suggested an electrical short circuit due to haphazard wiring. However, some eyewitnesses claimed the fire started in an adjacent empty plot where garbage was being burned and then jumped to the market building.
- **The Damage:** * Over 40 shops and several warehouses were completely destroyed.
- High-value inventories, including solar panels, batteries, mobile phones, and laptops, were reduced to ashes.
- Financial losses were estimated at over Rs1 billion (\$3.6 million).
- **Casualties:** There were no fatalities reported, though the dense smoke and narrow alleys made the evacuation of residential floors above the market extremely difficult.



Gul Plaza Fire

January 17–18, 2026

Plot No. 32, Preedy Quarters, Muhammad Ali Jinnah Road, Saddar
Approx 1.68 to 1.75 acres.

- **The Incident:** The fire erupted on a Saturday night at approximately 10:15 PM. It originated in a shop on the ground floor and raged for over 36 hours. The blaze quickly became a "Category-III" fire, leading to the collapse of sections of the building.
- **The Cause:** Investigations traced the spark to a mishap in an artificial flower shop. It was reported that two minors playing with matches accidentally ignited combustible materials while their father was away.
- **The Damage:** Over 1,100 shops were destroyed, primarily those containing wedding garments, electronics, and plastics.
- The building suffered severe structural failure; the SBCA subsequently declared the remains unstable and sealed the site for potential demolition.
- Financial losses are estimated at over Rs3 billion.
- **Casualties:** This was a mass-casualty event with 73 confirmed deaths and over 20 injuries. Most victims died of suffocation on the mezzanine floor after locking themselves inside a crockery shop to escape the smoke, unaware that the exits were also locked from the outside.



The Verdict: A Decade of Lessons Not Learned

For a decade, the skyline of Karachi has been punctuated by **plumes of black smoke**. From the spark at Gul Plaza in 2016 to the horrific tragedy we are witnessing today in January 2026, the story remains the same: **Short circuits, locked exits, and ignored warnings.**

We call these "**accidents**," but when the same building burns twice in ten years, it is no longer an accident, it is systemic failure. Behind every "**gutted shop**" is a family's lifetime of savings. Behind every "**casualty count**" is a seat empty at a dinner table tonight.

As the SBCA issues its **450+ emergency notices** this week, we must ask: Why does it take **73 lives** for the law to wake up? Karachi's commercial heartbeat cannot continue to beat in buildings that are death traps.

***Karachi is Burning. Stand Up
Before the Next Spark.***