

# Buildings' survey unearths safety gaps

## Over 1,700 structures face severe fire hazards

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Alarmingly weak fire safety standards have been uncovered in major commercial buildings in Punjab following a provincewide inspection launched after a deadly fire in Karachi's Gul Plaza claimed dozens of lives, officials said.

An initial fire safety survey conducted by the Punjab Emergency and Rescue Department found serious deficiencies in a large majority of plazas, markets and shopping malls. Of the 2,214 buildings inspected across the province, 1,722 were placed in the lowest "D" safety category, indicating severe fire hazards.

Lahore emerged as the most high-risk city in the survey.

Officials classified 682 buildings in the provincial capital as D-grade, while 13 structures were declared completely unsafe for occupation.

The report noted that many of the D-category buildings lack basic fire protection measures, including alarms, sprinkler systems, and clearly marked emergency exits. Authorities warned that such gaps could result in loss of life and property in the event of a blaze.

By contrast, only 65 buildings across Punjab met the highest A-grade safety standards. Another 129 were classified as B-grade, while 284 fell into the C category.

The findings come in the af-

termath of the Gul Plaza blaze in Karachi, which killed several dozen people. Rescue officials said 86 people had been reported unaccounted for, while some bodies had been identified and the remains of at least 17 were undergoing DNA analysis.

### Notices will be issued to owners of D-grade buildings for installing fire safety systems

After the incident, Punjab Chief Minister Maryam Nawaz announced a comprehensive audit of fire safety systems across the province. She said new standard operating procedures (SOPs) would be developed and enforcement strengthened to address risks such as electrical short circuits and delayed emergency response.

"Inspections will cover both public and private buildings, including government offices, hospitals, schools, and commercial facilities," the chief minister said in a statement, adding that public safety would remain the government's top concern.

A day earlier, Provincial Minister for Emergency Services Khawaja Salman Rafique ordered enforcement of the Building Safety

Regulations 2022 throughout Punjab. Chairing a meeting at Rescue 1122 headquarters in Lahore, he directed officials to take strict legal action against violators.

During a briefing, Emergency Services Secretary Dr Rizwan Naseer told participants that surveys of all 2,214 high-rise buildings had been completed. He also outlined plans to expand fire services to 39 additional tehsils at an estimated cost of Rs 2 billion.

He emphasised that enforcing building safety regulations was "the need of the hour" to prevent loss of lives.

Officials said notices would be issued immediately to owners of D-grade buildings, requiring mandatory installation of fire safety systems within a fixed timeframe. Failure to comply, they warned, would result in fines and legal action.

According to Rescue 1122, Punjab currently operates 281 fire vehicles with 2,446 trained fire rescuers. The service has so far responded to more than 280,000 fire emergencies, preventing estimated losses of Rs768 billion.

Provincewide, emergency services include over 15,000 rescuers, 892 ambulances, 20 aerial platforms, and 800 rescue boats.

Authorities reiterated that enforcement of fire safety laws would be intensified across Punjab.