

News Clipping

Client / Product : The Hong Kong Institute of Surveyors
Publication : South China Morning Post
Date : 9 July 2016 (Saturday)
Page : EDT1

SAFETY

Safety rule lapses uncovered in many mini-storage units

Government check of facilities followed blaze in Ngau Tau Kok which left two firemen dead

Peace Chiu
peace.chiu@scmp.com

A citywide fire safety inspection prompted by the killer blaze at an industrial building in Ngau Tau Kok last month has found many mini-storage facilities flouting safety rules.

The Fire Services Department reported progress in the safety drive after another blaze in a Cheung Sha Wan industrial building housing mini-storage units on Thursday night, with three people requiring hospital treatment. Two were siblings living in a cubicle.

There were at least two storage facilities breaching fire safety regulations in the building.

Deputy chief fire officer Terrance Tsang Wing-hung said the department had checked around 90 mini-storage facilities so far in the wake of last month's blaze that killed two firemen.

The department had uncovered "not a small number" of violations, he said, without providing the actual figures.

The Ngau Tau Kok fire burned for more than 108 hours, becoming one of the longest in the city's history.

Firefighters were hampered by 200 locked storage cubicles, which had to be individually broken into so they could get to all the floors. They had no idea what was stored in the cubicles, some of which were later found to contain inflammable and possibly toxic materials.

The government had previously said it was targeting nearly 500 mini-storage outlets for inspection within two months.

Tsang said: "We encountered irregularities including insufficient passageways, insufficient hose reel coverage and obstruction to fire service installations arising from the configuration of mini-storage facilities."

Government departments would take immediate action where rules were broken, he said.

Michael Pang Yuk-lung, chief building surveyor for fire safety at the Buildings Department, said his colleagues had also inspected around 40 mini-storage facilities and found violations such as

passageways for evacuation being too long or too narrow. The configuration of cubicles was also found to be blocking fire service installations.

Tsang said the fire, buildings, lands and labour departments had met representatives from the mini-storage trade, including operators and the Self Storage Association Asia.

During the talks, officials told the trade representatives to take administrative fire safety measures, such as increasing the number of management and security staff, regulating what their tenants stored and banning dangerous goods.

The representatives said they would have a "proactive attitude" and cooperate to improve the safety of mini-storage operations, Tsang noted.

Architectural, surveying, and planning lawmaker Tony Tse Wai-chuen urged the government to extend the inspection of mini-storage facilities to all old industrial buildings. "The current approach only solves problems when they surface. That should not be the case," Tse said.

The fire on Thursday night started in a storage unit with wooden planks subdividing cubicles, but the Fire Services Department said it was not a mini-storage facility.

Surveyor Vincent Ho Kui-yip said rectifying the shortage of hose reels should not be an issue, but he noted that widening passageways would require a change in layout, which would affect the storage space for storage operators and in turn their income.



Firefighters battle the blaze at the Cheung Sha Wan building.

Photo: SCMP Pictures

> PROBE ORDERED AS