

Government to gazette Fire Safety (Industrial Buildings) Bill

The Government will publish the Fire Safety (Industrial Buildings) Bill in the Gazette this Friday (November 30).

A spokesperson for the Security Bureau today (November 28) said, "The objective of the Bill is to bring the fire safety of old industrial buildings (IBs) up to present-day standards for better protection of life and property of the public."

The fire safety measures in existing buildings generally meet the standards prevailing at the time of their construction. Pursuant to the Buildings Ordinance, the planning, design and construction of a building is required to comply with the Ordinance and its subsidiary legislation. However, the fire safety standards of old buildings may fall short of the standards prescribed in the prevailing Codes of Practice published by the Fire Services Department (FSD) and the Buildings Department (BD). For example, pre-1987 industrial buildings may not be equipped with automatic sprinkler systems.

"Fires at certain old IBs in recent years have heightened public concern over their fire risks," the spokesperson added.

The Director of Fire Services and the Director of Buildings are the enforcement authorities under the Bill. The Bill will empower them to inspect the target IBs and issue fire safety directions to require the owners or occupiers to upgrade the fire service installations or equipment, or fire safety construction of such buildings to the required standards. Depending on the actual circumstances, improvement measures include installation of automatic sprinkler systems, provision of sufficient directional and exit signs, provision of secondary source of electrical power supply, provision of fire hydrant and hose reel systems, provision of adequate means of escape, and provision of fire-resistant construction to inhibit the spread of fire and ensure the structural integrity of the buildings. The owners or occupiers must comply with the requirements within the time limit as stipulated in the directions.

To ascertain the technical feasibility of the proposed fire safety requirements in pre-1987 IBs, the FSD and BD have jointly conducted a study, using three IBs of different ages as test cases. The study reveals that it is generally feasible to carry out the proposed improvement works for pre-1987 IBs, except that the building structure and actual circumstances would make it difficult for these buildings to add firefighting and rescue stairways or to provide refuge floors or staircase interchanges. The Bill will therefore not seek to impose such requirements on the owners.

According to the BD's record, around 1 100 IBs will be subject to the regulation of the Bill. Upon passage by Legislative Council (LegCo), the Bill

will be implemented in two phases, starting with some 400 IBs which were constructed or had their building plans submitted in or before March 1973. The majority of these IBs are not sprinkler-protected.

The Bill will be introduced into the LegCo for the First Reading and the Second Reading on December 12.