



# Improving Fire Safety in Bangladesh

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In November 2012, in Bangladesh, a tragic fire occurred in a garment factory that claimed the lives of 112 workers and injured at least 150 others. BSEF members are deeply moved by this terrible tragedy and regret that better fire safety measures that would have prevented hundreds of people to die or to be injured had not been put in place.

Bangladeshi industry suffers lack of fire safety requirements and chronic deficiencies as regards to these requirements together with safety problems including locked or blocked fire escapes, electric short circuits, and malfunctioning fire-fighting equipment. A study<sup>2</sup> by the International Labour Rights Forum estimates that in Bangladesh - where factory fires are common and deadly - **more than 1,000 workers died in hundreds of factory fires or accidents from 1990 to 2012.**

Bangladesh is, however, moving in the right direction. The latest fire sparked a movement that resulted in a series of safety reforms and regulations. **In May 2013, a legally binding *Accord on Fire and Building Safety in Bangladesh*<sup>3</sup>, to help establish a fire and building safety program in Bangladesh for a period of five years, has been signed by a number of stakeholders.**

Additionally, in July 2013, EU Trade Commissioner Karel De Gucht launched a Global Sustainability Compact in response to the Bangladesh tragedies. This major multi-stakeholder agreement aims at improving labour rights, working conditions and factory safety in the Ready-Made Garment industry in Bangladesh. It commits the Government of Bangladesh, the European Union, and the International Labour Organisation to a number of actions, **including the improvement of fire safety in ready-made garment factories, to help reduce the risks of another tragedy happening again<sup>4</sup>.**

In order to **effectively reduce fires** and their detrimental effects, it is crucial to put in place regulations and standards<sup>5</sup> that ensure a good level of protection from fires. This can only be achieved if the **improvement of three key elements<sup>6</sup> is taken into account:**

- **passive resistance of materials** (e.g. flame retardants<sup>7</sup>, fire doors and fire walls)
- **active suppression of fire** (e.g. fire extinguishers, sprinkler systems and standpipes)
- **early detection of fire** (e.g. smoke and/or fire alarm systems).

Technological developments in the field of building materials, industry and consumer products (insulation, electronics, etc.) have led to growth in an increased risk of fire in buildings. As a result, today it is more imperative than ever to protect people from fire risks. By, among other things, **using flame retardants in building materials such as insulation material and fuse panels, fire safety can be increased.**

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<sup>1</sup> <http://laborrights.org/sites/default/files/publications-and-resources/DeadlySecrets.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <http://laborrights.org/sites/default/files/publications-and-resources/DeadlySecrets.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.laborrights.org/sites/default/files/publications-and-resources/accord-on-fire-and-building-safety-in-bangladesh-2013-05-13.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> [http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release\\_IP-13-667\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-13-667_en.htm)

<sup>5</sup> [http://www.iso.org/iso/home/search.htm?qt=fire&published=on&active\\_tab=standards&sort\\_by=rel](http://www.iso.org/iso/home/search.htm?qt=fire&published=on&active_tab=standards&sort_by=rel)

<sup>6</sup> <http://firechief.com/leadership/public-education/fire-prevention-triangle-201105>

<sup>7</sup> Flame retardants are a well-proven tool to prevent fires from starting, or spreading as they can significantly delay ignition in the early stages of a fire when it can still be extinguished, or occupants of a building can escape.