Chapter-4

Preparedness of Department of Fire Services

Chapter 4: Preparedness of Department of Fire Services

Home Department

The Department had not conducted vulnerability analysis of fire vulnerable buildings and also not prepared database of hazardous industries. The Department had no database of high-rise buildings in the State despite the PAC's recommendation for identification of such buildings. The Himachal Pradesh Fire Fighting Services Act, 1984, empowers the Department to enter/ examine premises for compliance with fire safety norms but are weak as they do not contain provisions to enforce compliance and penal provisions for non-adherence to norms. 23 test-checked fire control centres did not have adequate and reliable source of water. Against approved fleet strength of 115 fire fighting vehicles in the State, only 85 were available. At the same time, Department surrendered budget of ₹ 6.22 crore under 'Motor Vehicle' during 2018-21. Against required 5,055 personal protection equipment (PPE) for firefighters, only 728 were available. The unique toll-free number (101) assigned to attend first information about fire incidents had not been made available in any of the fire posts in the State which could result in delay in receipt of information and response time. Against sanctioned strength of 938 post of operational staff, 257 (28 *per cent*) posts were lying vacant, adversely impacting the capacity of fire control centres. The Department did not conduct any physical assessment test of firefighters during 2018-21 to ascertain their fitness for the job. In 22 test-checked fire control centres, there was delayed response to fire incidents.

4.1 Introduction

The Himachal Pradesh Fire Services was established in the year 1972. Prior to this, fire services in the State functioned under the control of various Municipal Committees/ Corporations. The Government of Himachal Pradesh enacted the Himachal Pradesh Fire Fighting Services Act, 1984 (amended in 2000) for maintenance of effective fire-fighting service in the state. The department has not drafted any Rules for enactment of Fire Services Act. The primary role of the Department is to protect life and property from fire and other calamities. The responsibilities of the Department include issuance and compliance of fire safety clearances for buildings of above 15 meters of height and industrial and commercial establishments dealing or using explosive and highly inflammable substances, issuance of fire safety guidelines, issuance of fire reports and organizing fire safety demonstrations/ trainings/ awareness programmes towards disaster management preparedness in the State.

The department is headed by the Director, Fire Services who is assisted by a Chief Fire Officer (CFO)[1] and three Divisional Fire Officers (DFO)[2]. The department has 65 fire control centres as of March 2021 consisting of 25 Fire Stations and Sub-Fire Stations in urban areas and 40 Fire Posts in rural areas. The fire control centres are headed by a Station Fire Officer or Leading Fireman who functions under the overall supervision of either the DFO or Commandant Home Guard of the districts.

An earlier performance audit (PA) was carried out and featured in the CAG's Audit Report – Government of Himachal Pradesh - for the year ended 31 March 2016 covering the period 2011-16 to ascertain the preparedness for disaster management in the State. The PA amongst others, assessed and highlighted the shortcomings of the fire department and recommended for strengthening the fire department. This PA was discussed by Public Accounts Committee (PAC) of 13th Himachal Pradesh Legislative Assembly (December 2019) and had made certain recommendations.

With a view to ascertaining the updation/ improvements in overall fire safety preparedness, adherence to norms/ rules and adoption of best practices in view of earlier recommendations, Audit has carried out a review of the current systems and procedures. The objectives of current audit were to assess the further Planning undertaken by the Department to carry out the activities assigned; and compliance with the regulatory framework culminating in higher degree of preparedness and effectively carrying out its role. To achieve the objectives, we examined issues relating to expenditure; planning; legal framework; infrastructure and equipment availability; manpower; training and capacity building; and response time to fire incidents, with reference to relevant criteria prescribed in Himachal Pradesh Fire Fighting Services Act (1984); recommendations of Standing Fire Advisory Committee / Council (SFAC) of M/o Home Affairs; National Disaster Management (NDM) Guidelines on Scaling, Type of Equipment and Training of Fire Services; National Building Code (NBC) of India 2016 (Part-IV). The present status of compliance to PAC recommendations by the Department have also been discussed in relevant topic discussed below.

Audit test checked the capacity building activities undertaken during the period 2018-2021. The test-checked units included the Directorate of Fire Services, State Fire Training Centre, and 23 (12[3] Fire Stations and 11[4] Fire Posts) out of 65 fire control centres[5].

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1 Posted in the Directorate at Shimla.

2 DFO State Fire Training Centre, Baldeyan, Shimla; DFO Shimla; DFO in Directorate at Shimla.

3 Fire Station Rohru, Tilaknagar, Paonta Sahib, Una, Solan, Dharamshala, Bilaspur, Baddi, Kangra, Kullu, Hamirpur, and Manali.

4 Fire Post Amb, Dadasiba, Fatehpur, Nagrota Bagwan, Jwalamukhi, Theog, Kumarsain, Tahliwal, Jogindernagar, Baijnath and Sujanpur.

5 Selected through stratified random sampling with number of fire incidents as the sampling criteria.

The audit methodology included scrutiny of records, analysis of departmental replies, and joint physical inspection in five out of the 23 test-checked fire control centres. During 2018-2021, 5,301 fire incidents occurred in 23 test-checked fire control centres causing a loss of 117 human and 43 cattle lives along with estimated loss of property valued at ₹ 479.28 crore.

4.2 Budget and Expenditure

The Department had a total budget of ₹ 159.03 crore for the years 2018-21 against which it incurred expenditure of ₹140.83 crore. The major heads of expenditure were salaries (₹ 61.77 crore), major works (₹ 25.49 crore), motor vehicle purchase (₹ 6.54 crore) and machinery & equipment (₹ 4.54 crore).

The position of budget and expenditure of the department during 2018-21 is shown in **Table-4.1**.

Table-4.1: Budget and expenditure

(₹ in crore)

Year	Budget allocation		Expenditure	Saving	*per cent* of Saving
2018-19	Plan	14.00	13.99	0.01	0.01
	Non Plan	37.37	35.81	1.56	4.17
2019-20	Plan	10.72	6.51	4.21	39.27
	Non Plan	43.83	34.98	8.85	20.19
2020-21	Plan	10.00	9.53	0.47	4.70
	Non Plan	43.11	40.00	3.11	7.21
	Total	**159.03**	**140.82**	**18.21**	**0.01 to 39.27**

Source: Directorate of Fire Services.

The savings were high during the year 2019-20. The department was not able to spend as much as 39 *per cent* of its plan funds and 20 *per cent* of its non-plan funds which is indicative of poor financial management. Further, savings were also significant under the non-plan head in 2020-21.

Audit Findings

4.3 Planning

4.3.1 Establishing of Fire Station / Fire Post

The State has 12 districts and 108 tehsils. As per State Government norms of 2019, one fire station is be opened in every district headquarter and one sub fire station/ fire post is to be opened in every tehsil. Thus, the State was to have at least 120 fire control centres (12 fire stations and 108 sub fire stations/ fire posts). However, as of March 2021, only 65 fire control centres (22 fire stations, 3 sub fire stations and 40 fire posts) had been established. Of these 65 fire control centres, 17 had been established during 2018-21.

The department informed that new centres are being established in a phased manner.

4.3.2 Preparation of comprehensive plan for the State

Para 3.3.1 of the National Disaster Management (NDM) Guidelines 2012 provides for preparation of comprehensive plan for the State to work out the complete requirement of manpower and equipment for the entire State. As the first step in this direction, the guidelines provide for accounting and conducting a vulnerability analysis of all industries engaged in dealing with hazardous materials working in urban and rural areas.

Audit scrutiny showed that the department had not conducted any fire vulnerability analysis as also not prepared any database of industries engaged in hazardous activities. The Department, also had no database of high rise buildings in the State though the PAC had recommended to identify the buildings which are vulnerable to fire and maintain records for the same. The Department attributed non-conducting of survey for accounting of hazardous industries and absence of surveys of fire vulnerable buildings to shortage of staff.

4.3.3 Fire safety clearances

Para 3.2.2 of NDM Guidelines recommend for provisions in the legal framework/ Fire Act of the State requiring mandatory clearance from Fire Services department for all high rise buildings, colonies, residential clusters, business centres, malls, etc.; if the buildings/ occupiers do not fulfill fire safety requirements (e.g., proper fire safety equipment, escape routes, parking locations, etc.) there should be provision for sealing of such buildings; and that there should be provision for legal and penal action against defaulters.

Audit observed that the recommendations of NDM guidelines were not adopted in toto. The provisions of Himachal Pradesh Fire Fighting Services Act were weak as they did not provide for mandatory clearance from the Department of Fire Services for all types of buildings, as envisaged in NDM Guidelines. Section 15A of the Act, provided for mandatory clearance/ no-objection certificate (NOC) requirement from the fire department in respect of buildings of only above 15 meters of height and industrial units / commercial establishments dealing with explosive / highly inflammable substances. Besides, the Act did not contain provisions to ensure compliance and penal provisions in the event of non-compliance to norms, even for those buildings where it was applicable.

Before providing NOC, the department is to conduct an inspection of the building / occupancy to satisfy itself of the compliance of fire safety norms and non-compliance will result in denial of the NOC. However, there is no time frame prescribed for compliance by the building owner / occupant of the deficiencies nor any penal provision (e.g., sealing the occupancy) for non-compliance with directions issued during such inspection.

Section 9(1) of Himachal Pradesh Fire Fighting Services Act, 1984 reads that State Government may, by notification in the Official Gazette, require owners or occupiers of premises in any area or of any class of premises used for the purpose which in its opinion are likely to cause risk of fire, to take such precautions as may be specified in such notification. It gives the personnel of the department power of entry into any notified place in order to examine/ direct the removal of objects or goods likely to cause a risk of fire, to a place of safety. However, the Act does not provide for any penal provision in case such adherence is found lacking.

Non-obtaining of fire NOCs by schools and hospitals -

The Supreme Court taking note of a fire incident in a school had directed (April 2009) every school to obtain mandatory fire NOC. Government of India taking note of fire incidences in hospitals in various States and MHA issued advisories to the States directing regular inspections of hospitals and nursing homes to ensure compliance with National Building Code (NBC) fire safety norms.

Fire Department informed (September 2021) that out of 2,806 Government Schools in the State, only 55 schools had obtained fire NOC during the period 2018-21. Further, all 99[6] major Government Hospitals in the State had not obtained fire NOC. However, as there were no penal provisions in the legal framework of the State, no action against defaulters had been taken and compliance with Supreme Court and MHA directions was not ensured. Thus, the lives of general public working in/visiting these buildings remained always in risk.

Non-compliance with directions of Fire Department -

In three[7] out of the 23 test-checked fire control centres, Audit conducted joint physical inspection of 24 buildings[8] with officials of the Fire Services department (August - September 2021 and February 2022). The buildings were selected from amongst those that had applied for NOC from the Fire Department.

During joint inspection, it was found that 17 of the 24 buildings had received NOC upon having demonstrated adherence to fire safety norms. In the remaining seven buildings, the department suggestions had not been complied with even after 08 to 93 months of inspections. In the absence of mandatory clearance / NOC requirement and penal provision, the department was unable to initiate any action against the building owners / occupants.

The Fire Department stated that NOCs were being issued to those applicants who approached the department after adoption of fire safety measures in their buildings. The fact remained that the department could not force non-compliant institutions to adopt fire safety measures in a timely manner due to absence of enabling rules. The

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6 State Government Zonal, Regional and Civil Hospitals

7 Fire Stations Baddi, Solan and Tilaknagar

8 residential, educational, institutional, assembly, business, mercantile, industrial, storage and hazardous buildings as prescribed in NBC of India 2016 Part-IV

necessary provisions in legal framework may be added to apply fire safety norms to non-compliant institutions

4.4 Infrastructure and Equipment

4.4.1 Building Infrastructure

Para 3.4.2 of NDM guidelines (2012) recommends basic requirements of space for parking vehicles, office/ store rooms, appliance rooms etc. while setting up a fire control centre. Audit test checked infrastructure availability position at 23 fire control centres (12 fire stations and 11 fire posts) against four dimensions – parking facilities, separate office/ control/ store / rest rooms, computer facilities and own building. The position is shown in the **Table-4.2**.

Table-4.2: Availability of basic infrastructure in 23 test-checked fire control centres

Sr. No.	Parameters	Available	Not Available
1.	Parking facilities	13	10
2.	Separate Office/Control/Store rooms	19	04
3.	Computer facilities	12	11
4.	Own building	09	14

The absence of own parking facilities at as many as 10 of the 23 fire institutions test checked is indicator of the neglect of a critical disaster management department. Firefighting vehicles had to be parked on open roads / common areas (see photographs below) as they did not have their own parking spaces. This posed the risk of hindering the movement of fire fighting vehicles at critical junctures thereby adversely impacting response time.


Firefighting vehicles parked on the road at Fire Posts at Theog and Jogindernagar

4.4.2 Water Sources/ Fire Hydrants

Para 3.4.3.1 of NDM guidelines (2012) recommended tapping of available natural resources of water to ensure ready availability of sufficient water for firefighting especially in hilly areas. The guidelines recommend regular check of fire hydrants in towns to ensure their functionality.

At the 23 test-checked fire control centres, it was seen that –

- Six fire control centres[9] were wholly dependent upon natural / other source of water and in two out of these six centres, the water sources were located 10 and 12 kms away.

- 17 fire control centres[10] were dependent upon Fire Hydrants (FHs) for their water requirements. However, a large proportion of the FHs in these 17 centres were not working as detailed in **Table-4.3**.

Table-4.3: Status of fire hydrants at 17 out of 23 test-checked fire control centres

Year	No. of FHs available	No. of FHs in working condition	No. of FHs not in working condition (*per cent*)
2018-19	385	264	121 (31)
2019-20	395	321	74 (19)
2020-21	403	326	77 (19)

Source: Fire department records.

- Even in the working FHs, delay in availability of water was noted. In two out of three test-checked FHs in three[11] fire control centres, during a joint physical inspection[12] Audit observed that in the fire hydrant test-checked (August 2021) in Solan (installed at Mall road), it took 57 minutes for water to reach the FH. In the fire hydrant test-checked in Jogindernagar (installed at Amartax), it took 18 minutes for water to reach the FH. The delay in water availability in fire hydrants was attributed to absence of dedicated water supply line.

4.4.3 Firefighting Vehicles

The State Government had approved (April 2017) norms[13] of availability of fire fighting vehicles at each level of fire control centre (fire station/sub fire station/fire post). The Government had also fixed condemnation norms/ parameter(s)[14] for fire tender/vehicles, as recommended by the Standing Fire Advisory Council (SFAC), at 5,000 hours (Stationary operation) or 10 years.

As per norms, the Department was to have a minimum of 115 fire fighting vehicles in its fleet. It was observed in audit that against this required fleet, only 85 vehicles were available and even of the available vehicles, as many as 32 vehicles had outlived their maximum recommended life of 10 years.

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9 Baijnath- 12 Km., Kumarsain- 10 Km., Dadasiba, Tahliwal, Fatehpur and Theog.

10 Fire Stations Rohru, Tilaknagar, Paonta sahib, Una, Solan, Dharamshala, Bilaspur, Baddi, Kangra, Kullu, Hamirpur, and Manali; and Fire Posts Amb, NagrotaBagwan, Jwalamukhi, Sujanpur and Jogindernagar.

11 Fire Station Solan, Fire Post Jogindernagar and Sujanpur.

12 Examined by checking the water availability in the FHs after a call was made by the leading fireman to the Municipal Corporation / Council / local body authority for releasing water in the hydrant for test-check.

13 Fire Station- Water tender type-B- 1 No., Water Bouser 1 No., Combined Foam Co2 tender 1 No. and QRV 1 No.; Sub Fire Station- Water tender type-B- 1 No., Water Bouser 1 No., Combined Foam Co2 tender 1 No. and Fire Post- Water tender type-B- 1 No. and QRV 1 No.

14 No. Fin-F-(A)-(11)-11/2004 dated 7th September 2020.

Table-4.4: Availability of firefighting vehicles in the State

Sr. No.	Type of Fire Fighting Vehicle	Approved fleet strength	Availability of vehicles	Shortfall
1.	Water Tender Type 'B'	70	48	22
2.	Water Tanker / Water Bowser	22	17	5
3.	Combined Foam & CO2 Tender	23	20	3
Total		**115**	**85**	**30**

Scrutiny of records of 23 test-checked fire control centres showed that only 36 vehicles in 3 categories [15] were available against the approved fleet of 47 firefighting vehicles.

The shortage in firefighting vehicles was concomitant with surrender of budget amounting to ₹ 6.22 crore received for motor vehicle purchase during 2018-21, indicating that the department had not adequately planned for purchase of firefighting vehicles despite shortage.

The Department stated (March 2022) that budget had to be surrendered due to delay in receiving necessary approvals from State Government for fabrication of fire fighting vehicles on BS IV chassis as per requirement, purchased during 2019-20, would have taken time which could not have been registered after 1 April 2020 being non BS VI compliant. Vehicles conforming to BS-VI standard were not available on the GeM portal. The reply was not acceptable as permission could have been sought to permit purchase of items from other sources if not available on GeM, and proposals should have been processed in time.

4.4.4 Shortage of Equipment

- **Personal Protective Equipment (PPEs) –**

Para 7.5.1 of NDM Guidelines prescribes the requirement of essential personal protective equipment (PPE) for use of firefighting staff.

Audit observed huge shortfall (as of March 2021) in availability of the required PPE in the 23 test-checked fire control centres:

Table-4.5: Availability of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

Sr. No.	Name of article (PPE)	Nos. Required	Nos. Available	Shortfall	Percentage Shortfall
1.	Helmet	398	222	176	44
2.	Water bottle with sling	382	0	382	100
3.	Eye protection	402	4	398	99
4.	Ear protection	402	0	402	100
5.	Safety Steel-toe boots	402	0	402	100
6.	Safety whistle	390	103	287	74
7.	Knee pads	402	0	402	100
8.	Work gloves	397	93	304	77

[15] Water tender type-B, Water Bowser and Combined Foam Co2 tender

Sr. No.	Name of article (PPE)	Nos. Required	Nos. Available	Shortfall	Percentage Shortfall
9.	Overall fire-resistant suit/ fire entry suit/fire proximity suit/ fire approach suit	359	47	312	87
10.	Personal safety line ((sash cord) 15" length	375	4	371	99
11.	Gum boot/safety boot/firefighting boot	393	41	352	90
12.	Breathing apparatus	384	45	339	88
13.	Firemen axe	369	169	200	54
	Total	**5055**	**728**	**4327**	**86**

The shortfall in availability of these critical minimum equipment meant that firefighters were exposed to danger which could adversely affect their capacity.

The department stated that purchase of PPEs could not be affected due to COVID 19 pandemic but orders have been placed through GeM portal in 2020-21 and 2021-22.

- **Communication equipment –**

Para 7.3.1 of NDM guidelines (2012) provides that fire services must have connectivity equipment like telephone, telefax, computerized voice logger, GIS, Ham radio, static and mobile wireless sets and satellite-based communication.

Audit observed that the unique toll-free number (101) assigned to attend first information about fire incidents had been made available in fire Stations only. Except for landline telephones, no other method of communication was available in any of fire posts in the State which could result in delay in receipt of information and response time.

Non-availability of this equipment was likely to adversely impact communication in the event of fire incidents, especially in remote areas.

The department stated that due to COVID-19 lockdown, procurement of communication equipment could not be initiated. The reply is not acceptable as procurement could have been made before or after such lockdown(s).

- **Foam compound –**

Firefighting foam compound is a foam used for fire suppression. Its role is to cool the fire and to coat the fuel, preventing its contact with oxygen, resulting in suppression of combustion. As per SFAC recommendation[16], minimum 500 litres of foam compound is to be stocked in every fire station.

Scrutiny revealed that there was shortage of foam compound in 10[17] out of 12 test-checked fire stations ranging from 53 litres to 400 litres as of March 2021.

[16] Compilation of minutes of meetings of the SFAC from 1st meeting to 38th meeting-Page No. 637, Point No. 24.

[17] Total foam compound available in Fire stations Baddi: 100, Bilaspur 330, Dharamshala: 440, Tilak Nagar 160, Solan: 280, Una: 400, Kangra 360, Kullu 447, Manali 270, Rohru 400.

Shortage of foam compound would adversely affect the firefighting capacity of the respective fire stations.

4.5 Manpower Management and Capacity Building

4.5.1 Manpower management

State Government has fixed norms[18] of posting operational staff in fire institutions.

The cadre-wise position of operational staff in Department as of March 2021 was as depicted in **Table-4.6**.

Table-4.6: Position of operational staff in department as of March 2021

Category	Sanctioned Strength	Persons-in-position	Vacant Posts	Percentage shortage
Chief Fire Officer	1	1	0	0
Fire Prevention Officer/ Divisional Fire Officer	3	3	0	0
Station Fire Officer	10	6	4	40
Sub-Fire Officer	35	24	11	31.43
Leading Fireman	123	109	14	11.38
Fireman	578	377	201	34.78
Driver-cum-Pump Operator	188	159	29	15.42
Total	**938**	**679**	**259**	**27.61**

At the 23 test-checked fire control centres, against sanctioned strength of 353 operational staff, only 280 personnel were in position leaving 73 posts (21 *per cent*) vacant as of March 2021.

The department stated (October 2021) that proposal for filling vacant posts have been sent to HP Public Service Commission and HP Staff Selection Commission. The fact remained that non-recruitment of operational staff was adversely impacting the capacity of the fire control centres.

4.5.2 Training – State Fire Training Centre

The Department has State Fire Training Centre at Baldeyan (Shimla district). The training centre, headed by a Divisional Fire Officer, conducts various refresher training programmes and courses for officers, staff and homeguard volunteers.

NDM Guidelines (2012) recommend for adequate infrastructure and facilities at the training centre to train firefighters in realistic scenarios for different types of fire emergencies.

Audit observed shortcomings in availability of infrastructure, facilities, equipment and courses conducted as detailed in the **Table-4.7**.

[18] Letter No. Home-F(A)1-13/2019 dated 12th March 2020.

Table-4.7: Availability of infrastructure in State Fire Training Centre

Sr. No.	Requirement as per NDM norms	Availability
1.	Laboratory for fire prevention, flammable chemicals and explosives training	No
2.	Outdoor training structure like confined spaces building for firefighting training	No
3.	Rescue tower for practical training	No
4.	Smoke room for familiarisation with fire incident scenario	No
5.	Modern simulators for practical training	No
6.	Library	No
7.	Personal protective equipment	Available in limited number
8.	Breathing apparatus	Available in limited number
9.	Specialized flood rescue equipment	Available in limited number
10.	First-aid-kits	Yes
11.	Conducted specialized courses in radio telephony	No
12.	Conducted communication training	No
13.	Availability of water for live demonstration of hydrant training	No
14.	Turntable ladder, hydraulic platform	No
15.	Assessment of technical proficiency and physical efficiency of fire personnel up to rank of STO	Done at the time of training
16.	Equipment / vehicles used for firefighting	No; only foam tender and one motorcycle are available for training

4.5.3 Physical Assessment Test for operational firefighting Staff

As per SFAC recommendations[19], 45 years should be the upper age limit for firemen who are involved in firefighting and rescue operations, and physical assessment test is to be held every six months to ensure that they are fit to perform duties.

Scrutiny of records of Directorate of Fire Services revealed that out of 679 operational staff in the department, 437 (64%) were above the age of 45 years. The department did not conduct any physical fitness tests during 2018-21 as per recommendations.

4.6 Response Time

Para 7.2.2 of NDM guidelines (2012) recommends response time of 3 to 5 minutes in urban areas and 20 minutes in rural areas. Record of all fire incidents in the department is maintained in Occurrence Book and Fire / Rescue Call Register, in which details of fire incidents viz., intimation of fire, movement of vehicles, estimated loss, etc. are recorded.

Audit scrutinized records relating to fire incidents in 23 test-checked fire control centres for 2018-21 with reference to the prescribed NDM norms and observed –

- Fire Post Theog had not maintained record of reaching time at fire incident site.

[19] Appendix "11-G", proceedings of sub-committee on medical standards for firemen.

- In the other 22 test-checked fire control centres, there was delayed response in 59 *per cent* cases in urban areas and 41 *per cent* cases in rural areas, as detailed in the **Tables-4.8** and **4.9**.

Table-4.8: Response time in fire control centres in Urban Areas

Year	No. of cases	No. of cases within stipulated response time (up to 5 minutes) (%)	No. of cases of delayed response				
			6 – 15 minutes	16 – 25 minutes	26 – 35 minutes	Above 35 minutes	Total No. of cases of delayed response (%)
2018-19	733	297 (41%)	362	55	15	4	436 (59)
2019-20	620	218 (35%)	313	67	14	8	402 (65)
2020-21	498	237 (48%)	213	31	10	7	261 (52)
Total	**1851**	**752 (41%)**	**888**	**153**	**39**	**19**	**1,099 (59)**

Table-4.9: Response time in fire control centres in Rural Areas

Year	No. of cases	No. of cases within stipulated response time (up to 20 minutes) (%)	No. of cases of delayed response				
			21– 30 minutes	31 – 40 minutes	41 – 50 minutes	Above 50 minutes	Total No. of cases of delayed response (%)
2018-19	1219	658 (54%)	247	134	74	106	561 (46)
2019-20	1101	700 (64%)	178	90	64	69	401 (36)
2020-21	1012	620 (61%)	173	90	65	64	392 (39)
Total	**3332**	**1,978 (59%)**	**598**	**314**	**203**	**239**	**1,354 (41)**

Delayed response to fire incidents would adversely impact the effectiveness of firefighting efforts in preventing loss / damage to life and property.

The test-checked fire control centres stated that delay in reaching the fire incident places was mainly due to large distances from the centres, geographical conditions, bad roads, traffic jams, etc. This indicates that the department had not properly planned / rationalized distribution and location of fire control centres keeping in view geographical conditions, etc. Moreover, the response times as prescribed in NDM guidelines had already considered such factors in urban and rural areas.

4.7 Conclusion

There has not been any significant improvement in preparedness of the fire department in mitigating disasters, even after lapse of six years from recommendations made after audit exercise featured in the CAG's Audit Report of the year 2016. The department had not amended Himachal Pradesh Fire Fighting Services Act as also not drafted rules for enactment of Fire Services Act despite PAC recommendations to the effect. The provisions of the Act were weak as they did not contain provisions to enforce compliance and penal provisions to deter non-compliance. Planning was deficient as the department had not conducted any fire

vulnerability analysis as also not prepared any database of industries engaged in hazardous activities. There was no database of high rise buildings in the State though the PAC had recommended to identify the buildings which are vulnerable to fire and maintain records for the same. The department was not able to spend as much as 39 *per cent* of its plan funds during 2019-20. There were savings in other years also in both plan and non-plan funds indicating inefficient financial management. The required number of fire posts/ stations were not created. There was acute shortage of personal protective equipments for firefighting. Besides there was shortfall in key posts of operational firefighting staff. Expectedly, the response time of fire services was not at par with the prescribed norms.

The Audit findings were referred to the State Government (March 2022) and reply was awaited (August 2022).

4.8 Recommendations

- ***Surveys may be conducted periodically to identify hazardous industries and fire vulnerable buildings, and an action plan prepared for risk mitigation in such areas/buildings;***
- ***Legal framework should be strengthened to confer powers to enforce mandatory fire clearances, entry and inspection, and imposition of fines and penalties; and***
- ***Department may undertake steps to upgrade infrastructure and strengthen manpower at field units to comply with norms.***