

STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES AND REASONS

Subject: Appraisal of Draft Amendment to the Telangana Fire Service Act, 1999 – Strengthening Fire Safety & Enforcement Framework – Reg.

1. Background:

The Telangana Fire Service Act, 1999 came into force in February, 2002 when the State was part of undivided Andhra Pradesh. Over the last two decades, Telangana has witnessed rapid urbanization, vertical expansion of cities, high-density mixed occupancies, growth of hazardous industries and substantial increase in electrical load in buildings.

Recent fire incidents in hospitals, industries, warehouses, commercial complexes and public assembly buildings have exposed gaps in compliance, poor maintenance of fire installations, weak deterrence and limited enforcement authority.

Government vide G.O. Rt. No. 176, Home (Services-IV) Department, dated 04-03-2025 constituted a committee to review the Act and recommend suitable amendments. After detailed deliberations, a comprehensive draft amendment has been prepared to modernize and strengthen the fire safety regime in the State.

2. Deficiencies in the Existing Act:

1. Limited NOC coverage largely restricted to high-rise buildings.
2. No statutory power to declare buildings unsafe or seal dangerous premises.
3. No mandatory provision for periodic fire or electrical safety audits.
4. No compulsory appointment of Fire Safety Manager in specified buildings.
5. Weak penal provisions with insignificant fine amounts.
6. Absence of a dedicated Fire Prevention & Life Safety Fund.
7. No structured empanelment of third-party auditors and fire system integrators.
8. No statutory emphasis on preparedness and conduct of mock drills.

3. Major Reforms Proposed:

A. Definition of High-Rise Building (Section 2(h))

“High-Rise Building” means any building having a height of 15 metres or more above the ground level.”

Impact: The amendment is proposed with the objective of bringing greater uniformity and strengthening fire safety enforcement in buildings that pose higher fire risks due to their vertical height and occupancy density.

B. Expansion of Mandatory NOC Regime (Section 13):

1) The amendment expands coverage to include educational, institutional, assembly, hotel, hazardous, commercial, mercantile, industrial and storage buildings having floor area more than 300 sq.m, mixed occupancies and buildings with multiple basements.

2) For the existing buildings (already constructed) and which will now come under the purview of the revised Act, it shall be mandatory to apply (within one year of the implementation of the revised Act) and obtain Occupancy certificate.

3) Mandatory periodic renewal of NOC to ensure lifecycle compliance.

Impact: More buildings will come under fire safety net, it will prevent occupation without verified fire safety systems and ensure continuous compliance.

C. Empanelment of Third-Party Auditors and Fire Safety Systems Integrators: (Section 13(5) (a) & 13(10))

Only technically qualified and empaneled agencies will be permitted for installation and Audit certification of fire safety systems. Periodic third-party fire safety audits are mandated.

Impact: Ensures technical quality, professional accountability and reduces administrative burden on the Fire Department.

D. Electrical Safety & Audit Framework: (Section 13 (5) (b), 13 (11)).

Mandatory certification of electrical installations by licensed professionals and periodic electrical safety audits are introduced.

Impact: Addresses short circuits and overloading which are major causes of urban fires and strengthens preventive enforcement.

E. Periodic Audit and Mock Drills: (Sections 13(10) & 19A)

Provision for periodic audits and mock drills to test firefighting and evacuation systems.

Impact: Improves preparedness, reduces panic during emergencies and builds a culture of safety.

F. Renewal of Fire No Objection Certificate (Section 13(12))

Will institutionalize and ensure periodic review and verification of fire safety compliance by mandating renewal of the Fire NOC at prescribed intervals throughout the building life cycle.

Impact: Fire safety infrastructure in buildings, such as fire detection systems, hydrants, extinguishers, alarms, and evacuation systems, requires continuous maintenance and periodic verification to remain functional and effective. Otherwise, it will deteriorate.

G. Appointment of Fire Safety Manager (Section 19A):

Mandatory appointment of Fire Safety Manager in specified buildings with compulsory training and compliance reporting.

Impact: Fixes building-level accountability and ensures continuous supervision of fire prevention and life safety measures.

H. Power to Declare Buildings Unsafe and Seal (Sections 22A–22C):

The Director General is empowered to declare buildings unsafe, evacuate occupants and seal the premises until rectification.

Impact: Prevents potential mass-casualty incidents and strengthens enforcement authority.

I. Levy of Fire Safety Fee (Section 25)

The proposed amendment seeks to substitute the existing provision with the following wording- “Such fee as may be prescribed for buildings requiring Fire No Objection Certificate under Section 13.”

Impact: This change shifts the fee structure from a fixed statutory rate to a prescribed rate through rules or regulations, thereby allowing the Flexibility in Fee Determination to Government to determine and periodically revise the fee based on practical requirements. Alignment with Fire NOC Framework and bringing Financial Sustainability of Fire Services.

J. Creation of Fire Prevention & Life Safety Fund (Section 25A):

A dedicated fund under supervision of Home Minister sourced from fees and penalties for modernization, infrastructure and training.

Impact: Provides sustainable financial strengthening of the Fire Services.

K. Strengthened Penal Provisions: (Sections 27–31) and Designated courts and cognizable offences (Section 44)

Substantial increase in fines, criminal liability for negligence causing death, offences made cognizable and provision for designated courts.

Impact: Creates strong deterrence, fixes accountability and enables faster prosecution.

L. Appeals Mechanism: (Sections 45A):

Provision for appeals to Regional Fire Officer, Director General and Government.

Impact: Ensures transparency, procedural fairness and legally sustainable enforcement.

4. Overall Impact on Fire Safety & Enforcement in Telangana

The proposed amendment transforms the existing Fire Service Act from a reactive fire-fighting law into a comprehensive preventive and enforcement-oriented regulatory framework. By expanding the scope of mandatory NOC coverage, introducing periodic audits and renewals, and mandating mock drills, the amendment ensures continuous compliance and preparedness across high-risk occupancies. These measures are expected to significantly reduce electrical-origin fires, improve evacuation readiness, and minimize fire-related fatalities and property loss.

The amendment also substantially strengthens enforcement mechanisms by empowering the Director General to declare unsafe buildings, evacuate occupants, and seal the hazardous premises. Enhanced penal provisions, criminal liability for negligence, designated courts, and a structured appellate system ensure deterrence, accountability, and legal sustainability of enforcement actions.

Further, the creation of a dedicated Fire Prevention & Life Safety Fund and the empanelment of qualified agencies provide institutional and financial strengthening of the Fire Services Department. Technology-enabled compliance monitoring and lifecycle regulation of buildings promote transparency, professionalism, and sustained oversight.

5. Conclusion

The proposed amendments constitute a structural reform in fire safety governance in Telangana. They institutionalize preventive oversight, fix clear accountability on building owners, enhance enforcement authority, and ensure sustainable modernization of fire services. The reform is expected to significantly elevate fire safety standards and establish a resilient, preparedness-driven safety ecosystem across the State.
