

RISK & DANGER NEVER TAKE A VACATION

Building by-laws can only ensure so much safety. We should learn from the Carlton Towers tragedy and invest in rescue equipment, says **Kavitha Reddy**

As news of the Carlton Towers fire spread, local channels aired heart-rending visuals of people jumping off the building in desperate attempts to save themselves from being charred. It was an extreme measure of survival. It angered many and raised several questions but accidents like the one at Carlton Towers are neither the first nor the last since risk and danger are never on vacation.

Whatever course the law takes, for the many who lost their loved ones, it's too little, too late. And for the rest of us, it's wisdom on hindsight. As organisations and as individuals, we do very little to assess and understand safety without realising that fire drills, fire extinguishers, first aid kits etc are not enough to ensure safety, given that all

can fail and did fail at Carlton Towers. Rescue comes ahead of safety—it is the opportunity to be safe/survive when all safety measures fail. If safety measures are an assurance of safety, rescue operations are about doing the right thing when that assurance fails. Safety assessments as a process generally ignore rescue plans. The assessment checklist will mostly include just fire extinguishers installed in the corridors, red-coloured exit doors and approvals by the authorities. Routine check-up and an alert drill ensure that the safety measures are working but fall short of putting an alternative plan in place when things fail to work when it is really needed.

Being a mountaineer, a key lesson I learnt was what best one can do when buried under an avalanche or when slipping into a crevasse.

It is important to distinguish between managing situations that are within our control and managing those that are not. As a mountaineer, what is under my control is to use the best of equipment and have the technical skills to use them. But what I need to be prepared for is to handle the one which is not in my control. Safety rules are the same wherever you are. A few basic principles of rescue are all it takes to minimise risk and casualties.

In a case like Carlton Towers, which has several, small, independent offices, we live by the phrase "all izz well" if there are others in the same building. And this is how it is in several buildings across the city. We see a lot of re-inspection and re-assessment across buildings, but eventually, all that is ignored and we wait for the next Carlton Towers to take place.

People occupying these buildings should at least start insisting on basic self-rescue facilities and points along with safety measures.

The Carlton Towers fire should make every Bangalorean take safety and rescue steps seriously and to assess and re-assess them even when we don't have to.

We have the instinct to survive but our lives should not be left to instincts alone. We should invest in securing the lives of people by looking beyond building approvals and safety protocols.

The author is the director of Basecamp Adventures

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ESSENTIAL DEVICES

- **Self-lowering anchor points / bolted points:** So that ropes can be used to lower people easily
- **Large airbags, inflatable on release:** These will ensure that people who jump will fall to safety
- **Emergency ladders:** These can be easily installed in balconies to enable people to climb down to safety
- **Rail/string across two buildings:** This will help to shift people easily from one building to the other

