

Key concern on fire safety not addressed by SCDF, HDB

The recent joint reply from the Singapore Civil Defence Force and the Housing Board ([HDB fire: Illegal ads prevented firemen from locating fire lift switch](#); July 6) failed to address a key concern that was raised in several earlier letters.

Essentially, that is: How can elderly people and those with disabilities or mobility difficulties be safely evacuated in the event of a fire in a high-rise building?

With an ever-increasing elderly population and higher residential buildings, it would be reasonable to expect that more than one person would require assistance for evacuation.

We have been taught from a young age to avoid the lifts and to head for the stairs when there is a fire.

Thus, it seems contrary and unreasonable to ignore this instinctive reaction and expect people with disabilities to wait in their homes to be rescued.

I would suggest that it be made mandatory for high-rise buildings to have temporary places of refuge in each stairwell and also evacuation chairs - special chairs that facilitate staircase descent.

We saw the thick billowing smoke in another serious fire at Block 663 Yishun Avenue 4 (100 residents evacuated after fire breaks out in Yishun flat; 2 men taken to hospital; June 24).

How can elderly people and those with disabilities or mobility difficulties be safely evacuated in the event of a fire in a high-rise building?

With an ever-increasing elderly population and higher residential buildings, it would be reasonable to expect that more than one person would require assistance for evacuation.

It would be almost impossible for one to navigate his way through the corridor in the smoke.

That the fire safety requirements for super high-rise buildings, such as an additional fire lift and refuge floors, only apply to developments built after 2006 is also disconcerting. What additional modern safety provisions have been made to blocks built earlier? Residents deserve an equal right to safety no matter what block they live in.

Finally, I am bewildered by the SCDF and the HDB getting together to issue a joint statement.

Is there no conflict of interest, in this case, between a property developer and the fire authority charged with protecting public safety?

I raise these concerns as a member of the public, an HDB resident and a disabled person.

I hope the authorities will not dismiss these concerns and will, instead, start to address them.

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