

CAG says short circuit, poor maintenance behind train fires in India

by Dec 8, 2015

#CAG #Corporate Safety Plan #Economy #Indian Railways #NewsTracker #Second Sitting #Sleeper Class

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New Delhi: Short circuit, poor maintenance and lack of awareness are major reasons of fire in trains, according to the findings of the Comptroller and Auditor General of India.

Besides the audit report found that the automatic smoke/fire detection device in the running trains are not successfully implemented.



Shoddy management in Indian Railways? AFP

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Though recommendations are made by high level safety review committee and 12th Five Year Plan for introduction of fire alarm system in coaches for early detection of fire, it has not been successfully implemented, CAG noted in its latest report tabled in Parliament today.

A joint survey conducted by CAG and railway officials found that fire prone activities like cigarette smoking, cooking by vendors at stations, carrying of inflammable articles by unauthorised persons, accumulation of empty cardboard boxes and other waste materials were unchecked aggravating the risk of fire.

The report observed that Corporate Safety Plan (CSP) envisaged bringing down the number of accidents by 80 percent from 2001-02 to 2013 but number of accidents went up by 160 percent during the period.

The loss of human lives in fire accidents in passenger coaches steeply increased from 3 in 2001-02 to 9 in 2011-12, 32 in 2012-13 and 35 in 2013-14.

It also found that the Research Designs and Standards Organisation (RDSO), the agency responsible for prescribing specifications for fire retardant materials did not have their own laboratory facilities and the proposal in 2006 to create state of the art laboratory is still in nascent stage.

"The fire simulation of coach design could not be put to optimum due to non-availability of testing facilities," CAG report said.

The national auditor also noticed that the Railways did not enforce its instructions on shifting of junction boxes to guard cabin in SLRs, the removal of bottom latches of doors of passengers coaches.

Besides instances of non-working of exhaust fans in non-AC pantry cars, tapping of power from fan and light through open wires to connect mobile phones, non-maintenance of boilers, wiring system, chimney cooking with flame at the pantry cars noticed during the CAG survey indicated that these hazards which could contribute to the fire accidents were not adequately controlled.

As per the norm, one extinguisher in each vehicle with seated places and two extinguishers in each sleeper coach are required to be provided.

CAG noticed that the fire extinguishers were placed under the seats on the floor and inside the locked linen cabins. Fire extinguishers were not provided in the sleeper class, second sitting, general seating compartments.

It also found that the awareness campaign on fire safety are not adequately conducted by railways.

The feature of auto closing of vestibule doors which could contribute to avert the spread of fire in an accident has not been extended to non-LHB coaches, it noted.

Besides, Section 167 of Indian Railways Act 1989 was not amended prohibiting smoking in trains and railway premises.

PTI