

THE Fire Services Act 1988 has been amended with the passing of the Fire Services (Amendment) Bill 2025 in the Dewan Rakyat on March 5. Aimed at enhancing the operations of the Fire and Rescue Department (FRD), the key amendments include provisions for:

- i. Enhancing regulatory oversight on volunteer fire brigades;
- ii. Establishing accreditation standards for fire safety consultants and firms;
- iii. Defining the qualifications and responsibilities of fire safety consultants and firms;
- iv. Ensuring the quality and maintenance of firefighting equipment;
- v. Setting accreditation standards for fire safety training providers and instructors; and
- vi. Introducing guidelines to ensure private fire brigades meet national safety standards.

There is also a new provision empowering the FRD director-general to authorise the establishment of a private fire brigade in premises upon application by the owner, occupier or person in charge of the overall management of the said premises.

Notwithstanding these positive amendments, issues remain concerning fire risks in housing accommodation, especially high-rise strata buildings, gated and guarded communities, and affordable housing.

This writer contends that the Fire Services Act still lacks clear fire safety laws for housing accommodation and older buildings that are not equipped with proper escape routes, fire-resistant doors or emergency lighting.

It is vital to enforce mandatory fire safety benchmarks on all new and existing housing accommodation.

While the Strata Management Act 2013 (Act 757) and Uniform Building By-Laws 1984 also impose fire safety responsibility on strata management bodies (joint management bodies and management corporations) in

Recommendations to strengthen fire safety in housing accommodation



Safer homes: The Fire Services Act should provide clear fire safety provisions for housing accommodation such as apartments, student dormitories, and heritage properties.

their respective buildings, many fail to perform their duties, leading to neglected fire extinguishers, alarms and sprinkler systems. Fire drills are also rarely conducted.

The FRD should consider imposing stricter penalties on these recalcitrant management bodies.

Many low-cost flats lack fire exits, smoke detectors and fire-resistant structures. Illegal renovations using fire-hazardous materials and the unregulated use of gas cylinders in high-rise units pose additional risks.

I propose that future legislative amendments and the current fire safety policy impose a responsibility to conduct biannual fire safety audits on low-cost housing projects, ban high-risk illegal renovations, and strengthen local authority oversight in collaboration with the FRD.

Short-term rental units, such as Airbnb and homestays, are not required to comply with fire safety regulations. Many lack escape plans, fire extinguishers and landlord accountability.

To address this issue, I propose mandating the installation of fire extinguishers and smoke detectors in short-term rentals. The properties must undergo a fire safety inspection every two years, and mandatory fire escape plans for tenants must be provided.

Fire safety measures in basement car parks and housing areas must also be addressed.

In basement car parks, fires can spread quickly due to poor ventilation and lack of automatic fire suppression systems.

Many housing estates do not have designated fire lanes, thus hampering emergency responses.

Fire sprinkler systems and compulsory fire escape lanes should be mandated in car parks and housing estates respectively.

Many residents of high-rise buildings lack basic fire safety knowledge. Children and elderly residents are especially vulnerable, and nationwide fire safety awareness campaigns remain limited.

More public and community-based fire safety training programmes should be organised by

the FRD in conjunction with private or volunteer firefighters, contractors or competent persons.

Implementing these suggestions will incur additional funding for infrastructure, training and enforcement. To reduce the burden on the FRD, certain rules and policies could be enforced, such as requiring self-regulation by owners of premises.

Further, the government could introduce tax relief for owners who install fire safety measures such as sprinkler systems in their premises, and also offer incentives to recruit and retain fire safety competent persons, consultants, contractors, volunteer firefighters and private firefighters, as is done in some countries.

By adopting these suggestions, I believe Malaysia can develop more effective fire safety regulations to better protect lives and property nationwide.

**PROF DR NUARRUAL HILAL
MD DAHLAN
School of Law
Universiti Utara Malaysia**