



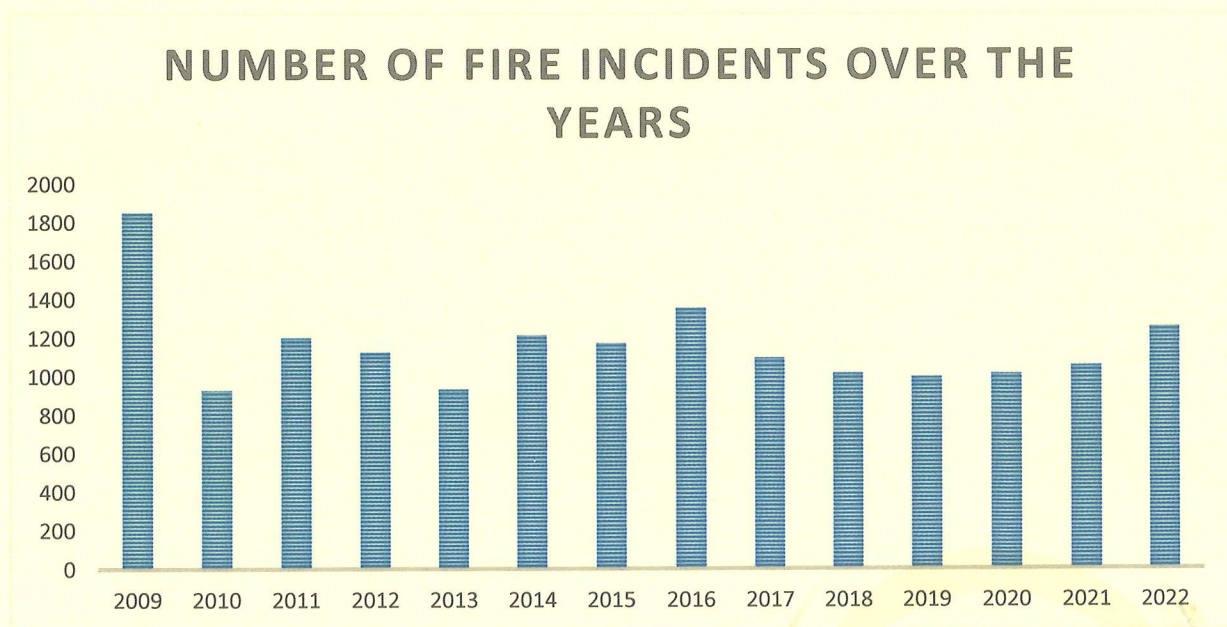
**NBRB/02/15**

**January 29, 2024**

## **PRESS STATEMENT ON FIRE SAFETY, JANUARY 29, 2024**

### **1. Introduction**

On April 14, 2008, the country awoke to a tragedy of a fire in a primary school, Budo Junior School that resulted in the deaths of many young children. Accordingly, government developed and disseminated guidelines for schools that same year (2008) to address the gaps and avoid possibilities of any future reoccurrence of the devastating incident. However, Uganda continues to suffer the devastation of fire incidents. Annual crime reports from the Uganda Police from 2009 to 2022 indicate as follows:



This translates to an average of **3 fire incidents per day**.

Fire incidents are contributors to economic and ecological damages worldwide and failure to consider the factors leading to the fires will affect more lives and properties.



Buildings constitute the majority of built infrastructure and play a pivotal role in socio-economic development of a country. However, durability of the buildings is affected by a number of factors including fire incidents/accidents.

Every building has a risk of fire and therefore, safety measures are necessary to mitigate the effects of fires. Despite the many fire detection and protection techniques available, building fires are still considered a major threat to the occupants and their properties.

## 2. Causes and consequences of Fire outbreaks

Since 2020, the National Building Review Board (NBRB) has investigated a number of fire incidents, with 52% occurring in commercial buildings, 35% in Schools and 13% in residential buildings. Generally, the investigations have revealed that the causes of these fires are largely due to:

- a) Human action (arson-fires deliberately set)
- b) Negligence for instance, charcoal stoves kept under the bed, smoking materials, rubbish burning places in the vicinity of buildings
- c) Electric faults resulting from inadequate cable sizing and protection, poorly maintained installations, vermin damaging the cables
- d) Acts of God, such as Lightning
- e) Maintenance works, for example welding

The investigations have revealed that every two in three fires are started intentionally (Arson) or by negligent action. Furthermore, the fire outbreaks that have resulted in the most devastating consequences have occurred within sleeping areas and for the case of schools, in the dormitories at night when learners are asleep. The younger learners (10 years and below) and those with special needs have suffered the most severe effects.

In the recent past, some of the tragic fire incidents in schools include:

Education Institution	Date of fire incident	Age group	Effects of the fire
Kasana Junior School, Nyendo, Masaka City	29 <sup>th</sup> October 2023	6-8 years	7 children died 5 children injured
Salama School for the blind, Mukono	25 <sup>th</sup> October 2022	8-12 years	12 children died 4 admitted with serious burns
New Crest Kibedi School	15 <sup>th</sup> January 2022	4-13 years	4 children died



			2 admitted with respiratory complications
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The factors in common that have been identified from the incidents that have resulted in deaths in schools specifically, include the following:

- a) All the dormitories were found to be overcrowded;
- b) Presence of combustible materials – hanging mosquito nets on the timber trusses;
- c) None of these dormitories had an automatic fire detection and alarm system – this meant that the sleeping occupants did not have the benefit of early warning;
- d) Some of the schools lacked fire fighting equipment and others had them locked away in the administration office;
- e) Inconsiderate use of burglar proofing with regard to life safety
- f) Lack of knowledge on fire safety and emergency response – this was observed from the high degree of disorganization during the incident
- g) Some of the dormitories were not accessible by the fire trucks;
- h) The most affected learners were either very young or were disadvantaged with disability; and
- i) Lack of emergency exit doors. For those who have emergency doors, they are usually blocked by beds and/or are under lock and key!

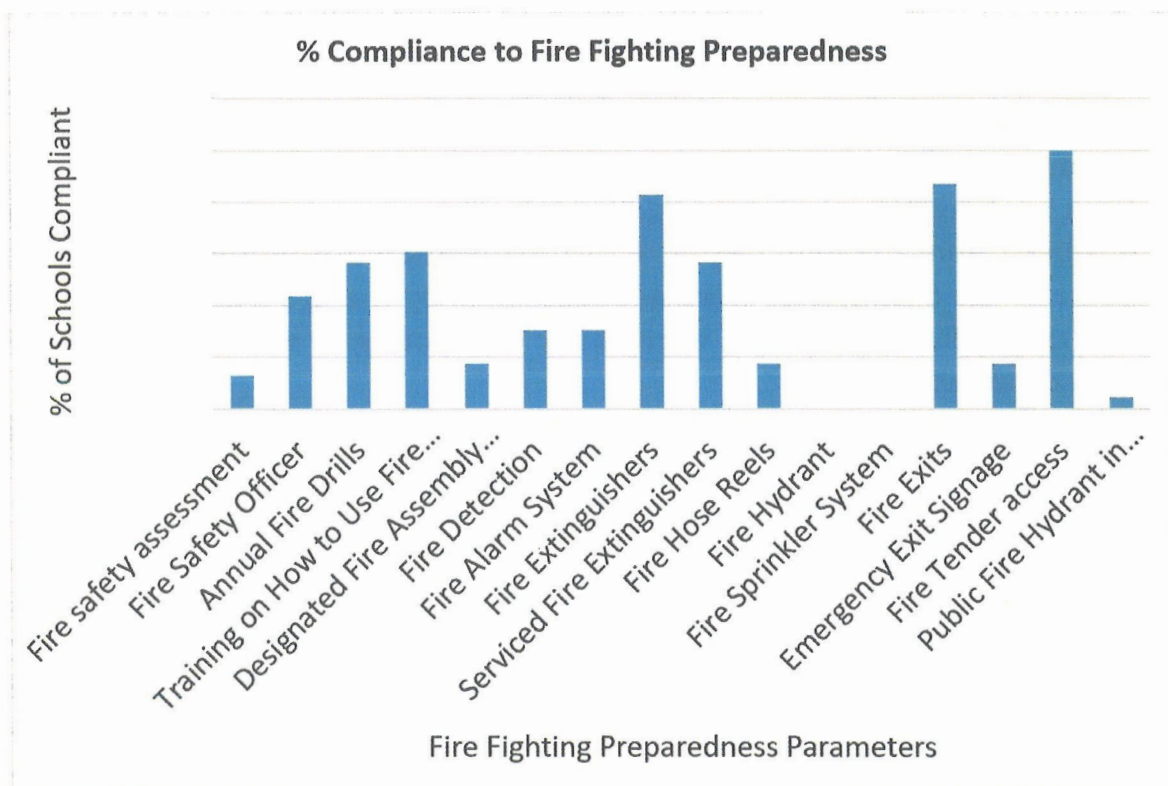
### 3. Study on Fire Safety

Arising from the extent of devastation and the vulnerability of learners, there was need to address fire safety of learning institutions. Consequently, a multi-sectoral team composed of representatives from the Ministry of Education and Sports, National Building Review Board, Ministry of Gender, Labour and Social Development, Ministry of Kampala and Metropolitan Affairs, Ministry of Local Government, Uganda Police Force and Proprietors of Private Educational Institutions Associations in Uganda was constituted to undertake joint inspections of randomly selected schools in the five regions of the country. 120 schools were inspected, 50% of which were government owned (30 being primary and 30 secondary) while the other 50% were privately owned (30 being primary and 30 secondary) between May 2022 and May 2023. The study aimed at assessing the status quo and making recommendations on the way forward. The findings are presented below:

1. Whereas all the schools that were visited were accessible by a fire tender, some of the buildings within some schools could only be accessed with difficulty;

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2. Only three schools had carried out a fire safety assessment by the time of the survey;
3. None of the schools had a fire hydrant on site for fire emergencies; however, about 10% had a hydrant in the vicinity;
4. 30% installed fire detection and alarm systems although they did not have adequate coverage;
5. The study also revealed that only 13% of the dormitories were well within the occupancy limits. In fact, one of the dormitories was found with an excess of over 70 pupils; and
6. The highest level of firefighting preparedness was 62%. Details of fire preparedness assessment are presented below.



#### 4. Recommendations

A number of recommendations categorized into short term, medium term and long term were arrived at. The most notable being the need for public sensitization, coordination of various sector players and strengthening enforcement mechanisms among others.

Arising from the above and in a bid to address some of gaps in the short term, the NBRB developed an **online fire safety self-assessment kit** to facilitate in assessing fire safety, safety readiness and fire risk management of buildings in schools. It is a web based tool in which requisite information is input and instant feedback received.

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As the country gears up for the new academic year 2024, NBRB guides as follows:

1. Building Committees and Building Control Officers should ensure that all school buildings within their jurisdictions are inspected and issued with certificates of inspection as provided for under Reg. 36 of the Building Control Regulations, 2020;
2. School administrations should endeavor to implement the *Basic Requirements and Minimum Standards* of the Ministry of Education and Sports and circular on *security and safety and safety guidelines to educational institutions* as issued by the IGP; and
3. The public and school administrations should make use of **online fire safety self-assessment kit** accessible on <https://firesafety.nbrb.go.ug> to assess school buildings and where necessary cause the required improvements. Please be mindful that each building is assessed individually.

***Safe Building, Better Living!***



Eng. Flavia G. Bwire (Mrs.)  
**EXECUTIVE SECRETARY**

