

One killed, eight wounded in Al Aweer blaze

Victims were having dinner in their room when the air-conditioner exploded

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Dubai: It was an accident waiting to happen.

A Pakistani driver was killed while eight others were severely burnt when an air-conditioner exploded and caught fire in their room in a poorly maintained workers' accommodation in Al Aweer on Wednesday night.

A civil defence spokesperson told Gulf News that those wounded were rushed to Rashid Hospital.

Colonel Saleh Humaid, Director of Al Rashidiya Police Station, said the case is still under investigation.

"The workers at the market's accommodation heard a loud explosion coming from one of the rooms that had 10 workers. The workers were having dinner when the explosion happened. One died and eight others were injured," he said.

Workers in the H Block where the fire broke out said they heard a blast, prompting them to rush out of the building.

"We did not understand that it was a fire. We ran out in panic and saw smoke billowing out of the room. We could hear them screaming for help but [we] couldn't do anything as they were trapped inside," said Mohammad Muneer, a Bangladeshi worker living in the adjacent room.

Elias Ahmad, who shared the same room, said he and three others were spared as they went out to have dinner when the mishap happened.

"There were ten of us sharing the room, and we are all cousins hailing from Bahawalnagar in the Punjab province of Pakistan. Six of my brothers were badly injured and it is sad that we have lost Parvez Iqbal," said Ahmad, who works as a driver.

He said all their possessions, including their passports and whatever money they had, have all gone up in flames.

Burnt blankets, blackened beds and other possessions lay scattered on the floor.

Electrical wires hang from cracked ceilings. The charred remains of the air- conditioner lay outside the victims' room.

The workers' accommodation close to the Fruit and Vegetable Market in Al Aweer houses about 1,000 workers.

Poorly maintained

Workers who spoke to Gulf News said the accommodation complex is poorly maintained.

Fifteen to 20 people are crammed into a room meant for eight people.

"It is the third fire incident that has happened in this accommodation in one year. People cook inside their rooms using electric appliances and the sockets are not safe. But there is nobody to ensure our safety," said Abdullah, a worker who lives in the area.

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