

Delhi schools get ready with disaster management plans

With school children being one of the most vulnerable sections in the event of a disaster like an earthquake or a fire, Delhi schools are getting ready to face any such eventuality by preparing their own 'Disaster Management Plans.' In a process that was started as part of a UNDP-funded project in September 2003, around 500 schools in the national capital have already prepared disaster management plans.

"We have covered government as well as private schools as part of this programme to prepare them for emergency situations," said Sanjay Kumar Jha, State Project Officer for the GOI-UNDP Disaster Management Risk Programme.

Committees comprising the education officer for the concerned zone, principal, teachers, parents, head boy and head girl have been prepared that would coordinate the disaster management efforts in case of an emergency.

"These committees are supposed to meet regularly so that the disaster preparedness keeps getting reviewed," Jha said.

Part of the plan is also to prepare a checklist of do's and don'ts in the event of a disaster, for example what is the exit route that should be used in case of a fire.

Jha said mock drills have also been held in around 275 schools covered so far as part of the programme. "Some schools have even been holding mock drills on a weekly basis," he said.

"If life-saving skills are inculcated in children, through a multiplier effect, these will be learnt by a greater number of people. Trust the children to go back home and tell their parents and others about what they have learnt in school," Jha said. Initiated in the backdrop of the large number of casualties among school children in the Bhuj earthquake in 2001, the project picked up pace after the tragic fire at a school in Kumbakonnam, Tamil Nadu last year that killed hundreds of children.

"Initially, the interest shown in the project by the schools was lukewarm. But after the Kumbakonnam fire, the schools became more interested in the programme," Jha said.

He said, now, however, having a disaster management plan in the school is the "in-thing".

"Since the tsunami, disaster management studies has become part of school curriculum and the schools are now keen on having a disaster management plan," he said adding eventually all schools in the capital will be covered as part of the project.

For more information:

**UNDP India Country Office – <http://www.undp.org.in/>
National Disaster Management in India – <http://www.ndmindia.nic.in/>
GOI-UNDP Disaster Mitigation and Vulnerability Reduction - <http://www.undp.org.in/dmweb/>**