

Emergency response volunteer extinguishes market fire with sand from nearby construction site

Interest Story

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Dhaka, Bangladesh—

In Bangladesh, small-scale disasters contribute greatly to annual economic loss. Everyday, people experience risk and volunteers play a large role in risk management and emergency response by passing on their knowledge of others and advocating discussions on preparedness in their communities.

In the Narinda community of Dhaka, a primary risk business and homeowners face are fires:

“When a fire starts in Dhaka, it’s very easy for it to get out of hand. Buildings are often just a meter or two apart, allowing the fire to jump from house to house,” Ms. Shami-ma Akhter, ADPC’s Community Action for Disaster Response (CADRE) instructor explained.

Recently after Mr. Mahamudul Amin, 24, graduated from his CADRE training course, his knowledge on fire safety was put to the test. One morning, an electrical fire sparked in a clothes market in his community.

“You could hear the commotion, so I went to see what was happening,” Amin explained as he recounted the story.

When Amin arrived on at the scene, a small fire was causing concern for all shop owners around him. “They were calling for buckets and water to put the fire out, because they did not have an extinguisher around,” he said.



“My primary concern was that they were trying to extinguish an electrical fire that ignited due to a short-circuit of overloaded cables with water. I just learned the dangers of this, so I had to intervene,”

Recalled Mr. Mahamudul Amin, 24, CADRE training course graduate.

Sand versus water

Lesson 6 of the CADRE training course details types of fires and methods in which open flames can be safely extinguished. Amin knew that in order to put out this electrical fire, he needed to find a safe material to smother the fire.

“Across from the market there was a construction site with bags of sand lying around. I motioned for some onlookers to assist me and we smothered the small fire with sand,” he recounted.

“After that, it didn’t take long for the fire to go out on its own. We were lucky, a small fire could have easily damaged the market more if the store owners would have thrown water on it.”

“The fire could have turned into an electrical explosion. We’re really lucky,” he continued.



Transferring knowledge – building awareness

“The onlookers were interested in how we extinguished the fire with sand,” Amin said.

Amin was able to informally transfer the knowledge he learned from the CADRE training course on fire safety such as steps to take to ensure one’s personal safety. “People wanted to watch the electrical fire spark. I warned them that they should stand back and clear the area to make sure their clothes didn’t catch on fire and so they didn’t get electrocuted,” he said.

In fire safety training, the acronym CADRE has a double meaning, which participants are urged to memorize:

- C – Conscious Prevention
- A – Awareness
- D – Detection of Fires
- R – Response or Reaction
- E – Evacuation

In this case, Amin covered each component of the acronym: He intervened and developed the community’s consciousness and awareness of the hazard; he detected the fire’s source from an exposed short-circuited wire; he made the decision to use sand over water to extinguish the flame; and he created a safe area for onlookers to prevent further injury.

Community dialogue as emergency response advocacy

Emergency volunteers, such as Amin, get the word out in their communities by doing. Once communities witness volunteers’ emergency response at work, it becomes evident that these skills can save lives. With this in mind, community dialogue becomes as a pro-active approach to emergency response advocacy.

In this instance, Amin was able to reduce loss for the storeowner, and limit the fire damage to recoverable costs. If the fire had developed further, the uninsured storeowner would have lost their income from one moment to the next.

“ The community considered me a local hero that week. Before the fire, no one was interested in joining as a volunteer, but once they saw how I was able to apply my training, every body has been asking how to join, ”

Amin said.



Asian Disaster Preparedness Center

SM Tower, 24th Floor 979/69 Paholyothin Road, Samsen Nai Phayathai, Bangkok 10400 Thailand
Tel: +66 2 298 0682-92 Fax: +66 2 298 0012-13 E-mail: adpc@adpc.net Website: <http://www.adpc.net>