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Disaster mock drill shows up drawbacks

Navi Mumbai: A surprise mock drill organised in Navi Mumbai, under the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), has exposed a few drawbacks in disaster management skills of various departments. As part of the exercise, on Friday afternoon, a make-believe accident was created near the Uran Phata area, involving the collision of a public transport bus and a huge gas tanker carrying hazardous chemical gas, at sector 19 of Nerul, near CBD (central business district) at 2.20 pm.

The main observer from Thane collectorate, Ravindra Mulik, told TOI, "The mock drill was organised to check the response time of various agencies and also their capability to handle a disaster in Navi Mumbai. We found a few misgivings, which will need to be rectified in case of a real disaster."

Earlier in Thane, a fire mock drill was held, and similar drills were also held in four other municipal corporations in Thane district.

Mulik further informed that while the 'accident' took place at 2.20 pm, the CBD fire brigade was the first to respond by reaching the spot at 2.28 pm. "However, we found that the firemen were not properly trained to handle the potentially dangerous situation in case of the poisonous gas leak, which could have led to something akin to the Bhopal gas tragedy"

He added that the entire report of the mock drill will be sent to various departments at Mantralaya, including the home department. "The purpose of the mock drill is to give proper training to the staff, and not to take any action against them," said Mulik.

The traffic police reached the spot a good 25 minutes later at 2.45 pm, while the CBD



CRISIS ZONE: The mock mishap was to test response time

police came even later at 2.55 pm. "The traffic and city police should have been the first to come to the spot in order to manage the traffic after the disaster and also to evacuate the public in case of a gas leak," he said.

Navi Mumbai police commissioner Ramrao Wagh commented, "The purpose of any surprise mock drill is to help us improvise our systems. So we will especially look into the weak points in case of a disaster."

Deputy municipal commissioner of Navi Mumbai Municipal Corporation, Amr-ish Patnigere, added: "I remember my staff from the NMMC disaster management team were loudly warning the public to scatter away from the gas tanker, but the public did not budge, probably because they could not smell the gas. He said that the 'accident victims' were immediately rushed to the D Y Patil hospital in Nerul, and were given all the emergency treatment on time.

Patnigere said that such mock drills were essential to keep the emergency response teams very alert. "During the forthcoming Navratri and Diwali festivals, we will be holding skits, plays and distributing pamphlets to warn the public about the dangers of LPG gas leaks and other types of fires, he said.

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