

Four workers die cleaning sewer tank in west Delhi

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NEW DELHI: In yet another shame for the capital, four men lost their lives by inhaling toxic gases while cleaning a sewer tank under inhuman conditions at an apartment complex in west Delhi on Sunday. A colleague, who tried to save the men, is battling for his life.

The deaths took place at DLF Capital Greens Apartment in Moti Nagar. Police have registered a case of causing death due to negligence and are looking for the person responsible for allowing the men to enter the tank. Fire officials said toxic fumes were still coming out of the tank when they arrived. Firemen who pulled the men out with ropes also took ill. "Four men were brought dead to the hospital while a fifth was referred to the RML hospital. We will take action against the contractor or the person who

allowed them to climb into the tank," said DCP Monika Bhardwaj. Police said the men — Vishal, Sarfaraz, Pankaj, Raja and Umesh — were sent to clean the tank around 3pm. Sarfaraz and Pankaj entered the tank without safety gear and fell unconscious.



SAFETY RULES IN PLACE, BUT HARDLY FOLLOWED

- Workers are to be given gas masks, safety harness and helmets, but that rarely happens
- Civic bodies are supposed to provide mechanised equipment at dangerous sites, like underground sewers
- A matchstick is usually lit at the mouth of the sewer to



check presence of poisonous gases

- Workers go inside only when the matchstick does not extinguish, but gases like methane are trapped under sediments and are released when workers start removing debris



NO LESSONS FROM THE PAST

Apr 29, 2018 | Two men die after inhaling toxic gases in a sewage treatment plant at a 5-star hotel in Lutyens' Delhi

Aug 21, 2017 | Sanitation worker dies in LNJP hospital while cleaning a sewer line

Aug 14 | Two workers cleaning a sewer die at a mall in Shahdara

Aug 7 | Three inhale toxic gas in Vasant Kunj, die

Jul 16 | Four labourers killed in a tank in Ghitorni

Mar 4 | Youth dies and his colleague is injured while cleaning sewer in Fatehpur Beri

Workers weren't trained to clean sewers

When the two men did not respond for some time, Raja and Umesh were sent in to look for them. They too fell unconscious. Thereafter, Vishal was asked to go in and check. He climbed in and started yelling for help after he realised that he too was about to pass out, said a police officer.

Fire officials said they had received a PCR call around 4.20pm from the P Tower of the apartment after which four fire tenders were pressed into service. "At the spot, we came to know that two men were taken out by the public. Four others were rescued

by us and sent to a hospital in west Delhi," said a fire officer. Rahmat, who worked with the men who died, said they were employed by the apartment complex to clean the STP plant every two months.

On Sunday, Sarfaraz, Pankaj and Raja were first asked to clean the tank, but initially could not enter it due to the stink. They had to keep the lid open for a few hours before they could step in. No safety equipment was ever provided to the men, who only used ropes and cloth to cover their faces while they entered the tank. "Hearing Vishal's faint voice from the tank, the security men at the apartment complex informed the police. The contractor had fled by then," said Rahmat. He said that all the men had been working in the housekeeping department of the apartment for at least four years. They would usually clean the floor but were not trained to clean sewers.

A probe revealed that the sewage was in the premises of the residential complex which had hired multiple firms for maintenance work. Efforts are being made to identify the contractor.