

# Challenges of dealing with fire outbreaks in informal settlements: the case of the 12th September 2011 Sinai fire in Nairobi, 2014

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## **Abstract:**

The purpose of this study was to investigate the challenges faced in dealing with outbreak of fires in the informal settlements of Nairobi County. More specifically the study examined the level of awareness of risks posed by fire hazards and response in the event of a fire among the residents of the Sinai informal settlement in Nairobi. It also examined whether the Nairobi County Government has issued Standard Operating Procedures that detail sequence of events when responding to fire in informal settlements, how the tragedy at Sinai was responded to by the residents and the authorities and the challenges that hampered the effective response to the Sinai fire disaster were interrogated with the view to identifying strategies of coping with future fires like the Sinai one. The study adopted a conceptual framework for dealing with challenges of fire outbreaks in informal settlements. It also employed practical actions reducing vulnerability conceptual framework to explain the challenges that exist in dealing with the fire outbreaks in the informal settlements. The study adopted a case study design with the intention of finding out the issues that surrounded the Sinai fire. The targets population was all the households at the Sinai slum. Both stratified random sampling and simple random were used to samples 341 households. Data collection was done by use of questionnaires, Interview schedules and observation check list. The data collected was analysed by use of qualitative and quantitative methods. Data presentation was done using frequency tables, percentages, pie charts and bar graphs. The study established that the level of awareness of fire hazards among the residents were limited. The study also established that Nairobi County Government did not issue any Standardized Operating Procedures as majority of the respondents were not aware of these documents and were therefore not used in the Sinai fire disaster management. Majority of the respondents were not aware of the fire fighting policy. Little was done to create awareness among the publics on what to do in case of fire outbreak. The study established that response to the Sinai tragedy took long as the authorities arrived two hours late after the fire outbreak instead of the recommended five minutes. The rescue operation was made difficult due to the fact that there was no central command for the fire fighters which resulted into more losses. Finally, the study established that the challenges to fire fighting in Sinai included inaccessibility of the area due to lack of access roads, lack of enough water hydrants within the city, lack of enough skilled fire fighters and lack of a fire fighting policy in the country. The study therefore recommended that the government to develop a National Disaster Policy which makes it mandatory for public institution to display fire emergency numbers and provide standard operating procedures in case of fire outbreak, government to form a National Disaster Management Authority to coordinate disaster management and awareness creation through intensified fire drills in the country, government to relocate the residents of the Sinai slums since this area is a way leaf for Kenya Power, railway reserve and also has drainage for storm waters from the Kenya Pipeline which in most cases carry inflammable materials and therefore a danger to the residents of the

slum and government to provide emergency lanes for vehicles dealing with emergencies on major roads in Kenya.