

Hout Bay residents plead for help after devastating fires

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News24 Correspondent

Cape Town - Hout Bay residents pleaded for help on Sunday after the fourth fire in a year broke out at the Imizamo Yethu informal settlement.

"There have been four fires... The people that lost everything a month ago, they have now lost everything again..." said Hout Bay Civic Association secretary Roscoe Jacobs.

Over the weekend, one man died and approximately 1 300 residents were left homeless after a fire broke out in the Mandela Park area situated in the Imizamo Yethu settlement.

Jacobs said that because the area was so highly populated, there was a constant fire risk.

"The informal structures are quite close to each other so if a fire breaks out... [the level of destruction will be high]

"There really needs to be some sort of intervention."

City 'needs to step in'

Jacobs suggested that the City of Cape Town needed to implement measures such as providing residents with Nutech materials that were fire resistant - as well as painting structures with fire-proof paint."

Alternatively, he said people needed to be moved to "areas where they can actually live".

In mid November this year, over 200 people were left homeless in the informal settlement, after more than 30 shacks burnt.

In August, three people died, after a fire broke out in the same location, burning down three wooden structures.

"One adult male, one adult female and one unknown person, who could not be identified due to the extent of their burn wounds, died," the city's fire and rescue services spokesperson Theo Layne said at the time.

Starter kit

The city's safety and security spokesperson JP Smith said the municipality had implemented a number of measures, including in the Imizamo Yethu settlement, to mitigate fire risks.

"We are the only city in South Africa that actually helps stricken communities, after [they are affected by] fires."

Smith said that a new kind of starter kit would be given to the affected families that contained material designed to help with fire prevention.

He also said that when the structures would be rebuilt, officials would assist in the formation, ensuring the homes were built with "corridors" of space between them that would better ensure the fire couldn't spread so rapidly from one shack to another.

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"We will try create some fire breaks."

The area has also made news headlines, as a growing gang culture led to a number of criminal acts.

In August, two people were murdered in the area: A 27-year-old man was found stoned to death in the settlement and in a separate incident, a 20-year-old was stabbed to death.

Previously, police arrested a 32-year-old man for shooting and injuring another man outside his house.

Police operations in the year also led to the confiscating of various drugs, illegal firearms and stolen goods.

Incidents of violence

In the same month, seven people were arrested for public violence.

In July, a case of arson was opened, after a deserted council building in the area was set alight by residents apparently fed up with it being used as a base for criminals.

Approximately 20 muggings had taken place in the area in the first six months of the year.

In the same month a Congolese man was robbed and murdered in the area.

In June 2013, President Jacob Zuma visited the Imizamo Yethu in Hout Bay to meet with residents in the build-up to the 2014 elections.

"I came to see for myself, and I have been shocked to see my people live in these conditions," Zuma said at the time.

In separate incidents over the weekend, at least eight fatalities were reported as fires raged across informal settlements in the Western Cape.

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