

## More caught for illegally converting properties to workers' dormitories



Photo: Wanbao

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It was a violation that could have led to Singapore's worst fire in 10 years.

Four men were killed when a fire broke out at a shophouse at Lorong 4 Geylang on Dec 6 last year. Eight people, including two firemen, were injured.

A Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF) spokesman told The New Paper yesterday that its records show that the owner of the unit did not have the necessary fire safety certificate to operate it as a dormitory.

"This constitutes a very serious fire safety violation and the SCDF will be taking firm enforcement action against the person responsible," added the spokesman.

Yesterday, the SCDF released its annual statistics for last year and revealed an increase in the number of Notices of Fire Safety Offence issued to offenders who have illegally converted factory spaces and residential premises into workers' dormitories.

These notices are issued after SCDF officers conduct enforcement checks at places including factories and warehouses.

They are given to people such as building owners who commit serious fire safety violations. Offenders can be fined up to \$5,000.

According to the SCDF, the number of such notices issued to those who have converted factory spaces into illegal foreign worker dormitories has gone up: from 79 in 2013 to 205 last year.

There was also a rise in the number of notices issued to offenders who have converted residential premises into dormitories: from 455 in 2013 to 519 last year.

The SCDF said it is dangerous to convert factory spaces into workers' dormitories because such facilities are not provided with the necessary fire safety measures for people to evacuate safely during a fire.

These safety features include emergency lighting and exit signs.

Residential premises that are converted into workers' dormitories often also do not have alternative means of escape in the event of a fire, the SCDF said.

## IRRESPONSIBLE

Mr Jolovan Wham, executive director of migrant worker welfare group Humanitarian Organisation for Migration Economics, agreed.

He said: "These premises are not designed to house people in large numbers. Turning them into dorms would be irresponsible especially if large numbers of workers are housed. Workers are packed like sardines into these places.

"These places are usually stuffy and crowded and some have triple-decker beds. But workers are often reluctant to file complaints, for fear of losing their jobs."



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