

# Safety in homes a burning issue

## Chief calls for houses to be linked to new system

OLDER homes pose a greater challenge for firefighters than skyscrapers because most of them lack basic safety features, the chief of Dubai Civil Defence has said.

The majority of the high-rise buildings in the emirate are linked to the 24/7 control system, which monitors and identifies faults in alarm systems.

Major General Rashid Thani Rashid Al Matroushi, Director General of Dubai Civil Defence, said modern technology is making fires, including the massive Torch blaze in February, non-fatal.

"High-rise buildings do not pose a danger for us but my concern is individual houses as they do not have any fire safety systems and are not monitored by us," he said.

"Fires in these houses are more dangerous and are more likely to result in loss of life."

As an example, Al Matroushi recalled a fire in a house in Al Ain, where an entire family was killed.

By Wafa Issa

The alert systems in high-rise buildings, sprinklers and safety equipment all help to make fighting fires far easier, Al Matroushi said.

"Our number one priority is saving lives and saving buildings comes

### FIRE FACTS

- » 347 fires in Dubai last year
- » There was an 8 per cent reduction in the number of fires
- » 40,000 buildings are hooked up to the fire safety system

second and we have not lost any lives in high-rise buildings," he said.

Last year there were 347 fires in Dubai, down by more than 8 per cent.

Only two occurred in towers, according to civil defence.

Al Matroushi was speaking at a

conference to announce the new 'life safety dashboard' system, which provides real-time information on fires and faulty safety systems in both residential and commercial buildings.

The system helps in fire response planning and in decision-making as it identifies hot zones where the majority of fires occur.

The system has so far been connected to 40,000 buildings in Dubai and the civil defence is looking to connect another 30,000 buildings in the next three years.

However, the majority of small buildings and houses are not yet connected, something Al Matroushi says has to change.

"We are hoping to have an increased number of individual homes connected to our monitoring systems therefore we are in talks with municipality to enforce criteria for houses so they become linked to our system," he said.

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