

Deadly fire was 'human error'

A fatal blaze at a foot massage parlor in eastern China was caused by an electrical fault in a steam room, China's top work safety watchdog said on Wednesday.

Flames engulfed Zuxintang Foot Massage in Tiantai, Zhejiang province, at 5:26 pm on Feb 5, killing 18 people and injuring 18 others.

A preliminary investigation showed the fire started after the steam room's heating system malfunctioned, causing rising temperatures that ignited some flammable objects, according to the State Administration of Work Safety.

"It was an accident caused by human error," Su Jie, a spokeswoman for the watchdog, said at a news conference on Wednesday.

The management of the parlor—which occupied the first and second floors of a six-story building in a downtown community—and the relevant local government department should take the blame, Su said.

However, she added that an investigation into the case is ongoing.

Police in Tiantai detained four people in connection with the incident on Feb 7, local media reported.

At the news conference on Wednesday, the State Administration of Coal Mine Safety also provided an update on its investigation into an explosion at Zubao Coal Mine in Lianyuan, Hunan province, on Feb 14 that killed six people and left four others missing.

Yang Fu, deputy director of the agency, said the authorities are looking into whether the mine covered up the death of a miner in the accident, which happened when 29 people were underground.

He said rescuers are trying to find the missing workers and that local authorities have formed a work group to investigate the cause of the blast.

"Investigators have found traces of a coal dust explosion in the shaft after entering the mine several times," Yang said, adding that the watchdog will punish those responsible if any cover-up is discovered. Police have detained a manager at the mine, surnamed Liu, who is suspected of covering up the miner's death, Xinhua News Agency reported.

Three officials are also under investigation, including two vice-mayors of Lianyuan and the local production safety chief, according to the report.

Site service

Some technical work is being undertaken which might affect service over the next couple of days I am told.

Business rates

I have been lobbying the government along with other MPs to do more to alleviate high business rate increases hitting some firms in our areas under the revaluation proposals. The government has offered substantial rate relief to many small businesses, but there remain numerous businesses that will experience rises in their rates bills at a time when they can ill afford the extra money.

Today the Communities and Local Government Secretary announced that he is working on a scheme with the Chancellor to offer more help, which will be welcome.

China to start anti-graft inspections in universities

China will send anti-corruption inspectors to centrally-administrated universities, discipline authority of the Communist Party of China (CPC) announced Wednesday.

The new inspections will scrutinize Party committees of 29 universities, including Peking University, Tsinghua University, Beijing Normal University and Nanjing University, according to a statement released after a Wednesday meeting before the launch of the 12th round of inspections.

Inspection teams will re-examine the work of Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region as well as provinces of Jilin, Yunnan and Shaanxi.

The new round of inspections will also cover the Office of the Central Leading Group for Cyberspace Affairs, State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development, China Railway Corporation and China Shipbuilding Industry Corporation.

Attending the meeting, Wang Qishan, who heads an inspection leadership group

of the CPC Central Committee, called for better problem-finding inspections.

The meeting urged inspectors to not only listen to what the Party officials say, but also watch what they do during inspections, and stressed that judgements should be made on the basis of people's comments on the work of Party committees.

Inspections should focus on rules implementation and discipline in elections and official selection to ensure a clean political environment, the statement said.

More flexible measures should be introduced in the inspection mechanism to expose and prevent corruption within discipline authorities, it added.

Press release: Town's flood gates to be replaced

Residents in Yarm are invited to a community drop-in this week to find out more about Environment Agency work to replace the flood gates in the town.

The project will start in April and is expected to be complete by June, taking around 12 weeks.

There are 30 flood gates along the flood defence in Yarm, and as part of the work some of the gates may be replaced and others may be removed and the flood wall bricked up, subject to further discussions with residents.

The work will start by replacing the flood gates along True Lover's Walk riverside path, starting with flood gates at West Street and working towards Silver Street.

Residents are invited to find out more at a community event taking place at Yarm Town Hall on Friday 24 February. They can drop in any time between 3pm and 6pm.

Project Manager Neil Smith said:

The gates are being replaced because many of the existing flood gates are approaching the end of their usable life. To maintain the current standard of protection for the town it's essential these gates are replaced.

By carrying out this work we will ensure the town continues to be protected from flooding from the River Tees in the future. I'd urge

residents to come along to the event where they can find out more about the work we are carrying out in the town.

Work is also already underway to carry out improvements at the Boat Landing stage. Some wall coping stones and block paving have been repaired and new handrails will be put up along the waterside of the boat landing in May.

In addition, there will be restoration and repainting of the perimeter fence and replacement of benches and litter bins in the area.