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How Safe Are You?

NU-Q Students Launch Website About Qatar's Fire and Safety Regulations

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The building you live or work in may feel safe and look strong from the outside, but have you ever wondered how sturdy it really is? How about the people who built it – how safe were they during the construction process? Was anyone injured? Or worse…did anyone die?

Qatar Under Construction will provide the answers to all your questions.

On February 14, 2013, students of Northwestern University in Qatar's Advanced Online Journalism class launched the website http://www.qatarunderconstruction.org, which features articles, statistics and multimedia reports about Qatar's building codes and fire safety standards.

"This is a topic that captured international attention when Qatar was awarded the 2022 World Cup," says Christina Paschyn, instructor of Northwestern's journalism course, Advanced Online Storytelling. "But perhaps more importantly, since the tragic fire at Villaggio Mall last year, which killed 19 people, including 13 children, Doha's citizens and residents have recognized the country's poor safety standards to be a pressing issue that must be addressed."

More than 1,100 fires occurred in Qatar in 2012. In the majority of incidents, the cause of the fire was unable to be determined by Qatar's Civil Defence. However, when the cause was identified, most fires were attributed to short circuits. That means even the simple act of turning on the lights can potentially cause injuries, or, in severe cases, death.

"Through Qatar Under Construction we hope to raise the bar for local and international reporting on building and fire safety issues here. More than that, we hope to shed light on what regulations are working and what desperately needs to be improved upon in Qatar's construction industry," says Paschyn.

Advanced Online Storytelling is a course that journalism students take during their junior year before embarking on international residencies. Students enroll in this intensive five-week course to prepare for their journalism or public relations internships at professional organizations such as Amnesty International, Time Magazine and The Huffington Post.

"Based on the statistics, I believe that this issue is very important. Our research shows Qatar has a worker fatality rate of four to five workers per 100,000, which is very high compared to the United Kingdom's 0.6 workers per 100,000," says Haya Al-Mannai, a junior student who is part of Qatar Under Construction's data and graphics team.

From the shelter of your office building or inside your living room, stories of fires and other construction emergencies may seem unlikely, but simple mishaps can have a devastating impact on your life. Don't wait until it's too late; keep yourself safe and informed by visiting: http://www.qatarunderconstruction.org.