



# in the face of fire

The extraordinary tale of Aravind's staff unity

Aurolab, Madurai

Feeling at home in the workplace creates an extraordinary bond of trust between employees and employers. This relationship became even more apparent at Aurolab after a tragic incident unfolded, transforming it into an extraordinary tale of collaboration and resilience. Aravind's Aurolab, renowned for its production of approximately 200 eye care products and its round-the-clock operations, faced a devastating fire accident in the IOL unit's polishing section. While the incident resulted in damage to machinery and facility, it was the collective spirit of the employees that shone through. They responded with unwavering solidarity and trust, treating the crisis as if it had befallen their own family. Together, they worked tirelessly to rectify the damage and restore normalcy.

On the morning of Tuesday, 5th July 2023, between 6:30 a.m. and 6:45 a.m., inflammable solvent used in ultrasonic cleaners for lens cleaning at the polishing section, caught fire. Despite multiple attempts by the maintenance team to extinguish the flames using fire extinguishers, the solvent spillage, caused the fire to rapidly spread across the room. The situation quickly escalated, engulfing the room in an intense blaze. Responding swiftly, the power supply was cut off, and all staff members were promptly evacuated. A roll call was conducted to ensure the safety of every individual. The fire station was immediately notified and they arrived in due course of

time. In the meantime, the maintenance team doused the fire using fire hose that sprays high pressure water. However, the smoke engulfed the entire ground floor creating a challenging environment for them to enter. Eventually, the fire service personnel had to break the glass windows to allow the smoke to dissipate. It took approximately 30 to 45 minutes for the fire to subside, and by 11:00 a.m., the smoke had cleared sufficiently. Insurance surveyor was brought in to assess the damages. Until then, access to the IOL section was restricted. Two male staff members who were engaged in extinguishing the fire were admitted in Vikram hospital as they had taken in a lot of smoke. They were later discharged on the same day.



The leadership team rushed to the scene to oversee the situation. Following an emergency meeting, a comprehensive restoration plan emerged and necessary resources were identified. The first priority was to restore macro-level activities, particularly the critical business operations.

By the evening, some sections, such as the Suture and Blade sections, had resumed their work. The restoration efforts continued throughout the night, with all staff members, including the maintenance team, office staff, and housekeeping personnel from Aravind-Madurai, remaining in the factory beyond 11:00 p.m. They worked tirelessly, participating in the cleaning and restoring processes. The packing and machinery areas were eventually restored the following day. After completing the major restoration works and taking the necessary safety measures, the IOL division partly resumed its production activities from Monday, 10th July. Sunder Ganesh, the Head of the IOL unit, assured that there would be no supply disruptions for the next 10 to 12 days due to the existing stock. He also emphasised the importance of maintaining a consistent supply overseas, as any disruption could have adverse effects on eye care in other regions.

Throughout the entire ordeal, the staff members played an incredible role. Their eagerness to restore the factory to normalcy, after the incident exemplified their deep-rooted connection with the institution. The cleaning process, hampered by the presence of chemical moisture resulting from the mixture of smoke and water during the fire extinguishing efforts, presented a formidable challenge for the maintenance team. However, their dedication and commitment energised them forward, tirelessly scrubbing and cleaning every affected area to restore normalcy.

There was no one trying to capture the incident in camera, which has become the norm these days. This was because everyone

involved prioritised damage control, focusing solely on overcoming the challenges at hand. They exhibited remarkable teamwork and selflessness, disregarding their own basic needs such as sleep, food, and time with their families.

Aravind Eye Care Services conducts precautionary training and mock drills for its staff regularly, ensuring preparedness for emergencies. These trainings equipped the employees with the necessary safety protocols and procedures to handle the situation effectively. Regular audits are conducted to ensure a safe working environment for the staff. These proactive measures taken by the management, along with the employees' unwavering commitment, contributed to effectively managing the situation when the incident occurred. Above all, it was the strong bond between the staff members and the institution that enabled them to navigate the emergency, minimising the damage and ensuring the safety of all individuals on the premises and return to normalcy within a few days.

