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Subject: (Embargoed) Speech by Assoc. Prof. Ho Peng Kee, 3 Sep 1999, 7.30 pm

Singapore Government

PRESS RELEASE

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SPEECH BY A/PROF HO PENG KEE, MINISTER OF STATE FOR LAW AND HOME AFFAIRS AT THE
NATIONAL FIRE PREVENTION COUNCIL FIRE SAFETY NIGHT AWARD PRESENTATION CEREMONY AT
WESTIN STAMFORD & WESTIN PLAZA, ON FRIDAY, 3 SEPTEMBER 1999, AT 7.30 PM

National Archives of Singapore
Good evening, Ladies and gentlemen

I am pleased to present the Fire Safety Awards to those who helped to make their workplace safer. This event marks a milestone in public education on fire safety. I would like to commend all the award recipients, who have gathered tonight under one roof. Your presence is a strong indication of your support for fire safety. To the NFPC, well done in bringing all of us together!"

2 Fires cause unnecessary damage. It is not just the loss of valuable possessions. It is also the loss of irreplaceable treasures such as old family photos and mementos which carry memories of loved ones and of memorable times. Sometimes, lives are also lost.

False Sense of Security

3 One problem facing fire safety education efforts is that fire-fighting services improve in quality, some may be lulled into a false sense of security. Indifference sets in.

4 We are seeing a significant number of fires that are the result of negligence on the part of the public. Residential fires have risen in the first half of this year by 2 per cent over the corresponding period last year.

Focus on Rubbish Chute Fires

5 About 40 per cent of these 2,037 residential fires involve fires in the rubbish chutes of HDB apartments. Fires in the rubbish chutes are usually the result of discarded lighted butts that are not extinguished, or because residents dump lighted charcoals into the rubbish chute after cooking.

6 This phenomenon can be arrested. These fires can be avoided if the public exercise more care in the way they dispose lighted materials. That is why fires in rubbish chutes is the focus this year.

7 The Public education efforts in last year's inaugural fire safety programme led to a drop of 9 per cent in the number of fires resulting from cooking left unattended. We hope that the focus this year will reap the same success as last year's.

Community Safety and Security Programme

8 Thus far, the Home Team's efforts in its Community Safety and Security Programme has focussed on Police interaction with the Community. Community Safety and Security encompasses fire safety as well. SCDF has made a start in working with the community to achieve this. Hence, the National Fire Prevention Council will not be alone in its public education efforts. The community is also involved in such efforts. The Civil Defence Executive Committees in the various constituencies use data provided by the SCDF to zoom in on hotspots in their own constituencies. Some make house-to-house visits to HDB units which share the same common rubbish chutes that catch fire frequently. The committees also put up education posters targeted at blocks prone to such fires. It is when members in the community look beyond their own flats to their neighbourhoods that we can work hand-in-hand to enhance safety and security in our home and country.

9 Over the next few months, more will be done to work with the CDECs to propagate SCDF's component of the Community Safety and Security Programme.

Fire Safety in the Commercial / Industrial Sector

10 Just as the community has become involved in fire safety, the commercial and industrial sector has also taken fire safety to heart. The number of fire incidents in the commercial and industrial sector has remained constant for the first six months of this year. The sector accounts for 14 per cent of the total fire incidents.

11 More, however, needs to be done. A close look at the breakdown between commercial and industrial fires reveals both encouraging and distressing signals. It has been encouraging in that fire incidents in commercial premises, such as high-rise buildings, shopping centres and warehouses, showed an average drop of 40 per cent, compared to the first half of 1998. However, the industrial sector, comprising factories, JTC units and industrial premises, experienced 30 fire incidents in the first 6 months of this year, up from 14 last year. When we convert such incidents to dollar terms and include the number of man-hours lost, this is distressing. We must arrest this trend.

12 The National Fire Prevention Council and SCDF will work with you to achieve this goal.

Efforts in Fire Safety

13 It is heartening to note that the commercial and industrial sectors have taken fire safety to heart. The enthusiastic response to this year's fire safety excellence awards is testimony to this.

14 The Fire Safety Award recipients tonight have distinguished themselves among the many companies that participated in this contest. However, everyone has won – the award recipients as well as the other participants. Your efforts in making the workplace safer help safeguard not only your businesses but also the lives of your staff as well.

15 Thank you for your support for this award. Let us work together towards a fire-safe Singapore. Thank you.
