

SINGAPORE GOVERNMENT PRESS STATEMENT

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TEXT OF SPEECH BY THE MINISTER OF STATE (DEFENCE)
MR. WEE TOON BOON, AT THE OPENING OF THE MOBIL
INTERNATIONAL SAFETY CONFERENCE AT THE TANGLIN
CLUB, STEVENS ROAD, ON MONDAY, JUNE 19, AT 9 A.M.

I have the privilege of being here today to formally open this conference which I think is of particular importance to all developing countries, including Singapore. I must congratulate Mobil for holding such a conference in Singapore. I believe that it will stimulate interest in industrial safety and bring to the fore the fact how vital this is in the context of productivity. I am sure that the deliberations of the delegates from Mobil affiliates throughout Asia and from Africa, Australia and New Zealand together with Mobil's top advisers will contribute greatly to the advancement of industrial safety and that Singapore will be able to benefit through their contributions. It is also significant that representatives of local industries are present here today and I understand that some of them will participate in this conference. This augurs well for the future of industrial safety in our factories.

Industrial safety is a subject of prime importance, but many people seem to take it for granted. Either the employer or the employee is blamed and the Government is accused of being lax in this respect. It is, therefore, absolutely necessary to have some organised thinking and action on this matter. Statistics of industrial accidents are copiously prepared but these figures remain barren unless some positive steps are taken to study the whys and wherefores of accidents and to build up the knowledge that will contribute to their prevention. There are some who say that standards must be set, that legislation should be tightened and that the Government authority concerned should ensure that accidents are prevented. Whilst I agree that legislation, standards and enforcement are basically necessary, these are, I suggest, not the whole answer to the problem. The main causes of accidents are people and conditions; people because of their performance of unsafe acts, and conditions because of people's failure to correct unsafe situations.

To us in Singapore, productivity has become a matter of vital concern. Our only raw material is our human resources and it will be evident therefore, that we have to develop our human resources to the fullest if we have to progress economically. If our drive towards productivity is to be successful, then industrial safety which is a vital factor, must be promoted vigorously. It is very often thought that because workers stay on the job after accidents, there is nothing

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much to be concerned about, but the fact remains that the aftermath of accidents is an impairment of efficiency, sometimes permanently and sometimes temporarily. The loss of efficiency certainly affects their productive effort. The occurrence of an accident in a plant can slow up production which in turn can affect other sections and so on, until a single accident may have wide-spread effects. Apart from the consequences of a loss of efficiency, one must consider the adverse economic effects on the employee himself as a result of his loss of efficiency; the economic and social costs can indeed be great.

Most accidents are preventable and whilst management may be convinced of the necessity to prevent accidents, they are sometimes uncertain of the best methods. A safety programme is, therefore, essential. The safety consciousness and will of the employee is necessary to aid in preventing accidents and therefore this is a matter which rests, first and foremost, on the management, the executives and the supervisors directing production. Of course many accidents are caused by negligence of the workers and by unsafe working habits which have been inherited from the factory floor. In Singapore last year, a total of 8,599 industrial accidents were reported to the Ministry of Labour. Of this number, 7939 were accidents which temporarily incapacitated workers from performing their work: negligence and indifference of the workers, and unsafe working habits caused many of these accidents.

With industrialisation and the advent of new technology, new hazards are bound to crop up and therefore it is imperative that steps must be taken to deal with not only old hazards which have been inadequately solved, but also to ensure that the new hazards are controlled as well. It is probably thought that simple hand tools cause no accidents, but surprisingly enough hand tools are responsible for several accidents. Mishandling them, neglecting to keep them in proper condition, leaving them in dangerous places and not least the supply itself of defective and unsuitable tools to workers can cause accidents. A safety programme, therefore, I suggest will embrace equipment and tools, methods and practices, the calibre and suitability of workers on a particular job and the work environment. I recognise, however, that there are other ramifications which must be considered very carefully.

It is my hope that the subject of industrial safety will be more actively pursued in Singapore whose economic development depends so much on productivity.

It is now my pleasant duty to declare this conference open.

JUNE 18, 1967.

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