

12 DEC 1977

OPENING ADDRESS BY MR WILLIAM CHENG, COMMISSIONER
FOR LABOUR, AT THE SEMINAR ON SAFETY AND HEALTH
IN INDUSTRIES ON 9 DEC 77 AT MARCO POLO HOTEL

Acc No. 77 0068 76

Mr Chairman, Ladies & Gentlemen

1 It is a pleasure for me to open this Seminar organised by your Association on the subject of Industrial Safety and Health.

2 In Singapore each year an average of over 50 workers die and over 100 workers are permanently disabled as a result of factory accidents. In fact, last year the total number of accidents reported increased by 11% over the previous year, ie from 3,827 in 1975 to 4,252 in 1976. In 1977 up to the end of Nov there were 4,235 accidents. There was also a marked increase in the number of cases of notifiable industrial diseases from 47 in 1975 to 1,123 in 1976. Up to the end of Nov this year there were 648 cases. The large increase in 1976 is attributed to the listing of two industrial diseases, namely, Noise Induced Deafness and Industrial Dermatitis in Oct 75.

3 Safety and health hazards have consistently taken their toll in the industrialised countries, and perhaps, more so in those countries that have recently started to industrialise. Controlling and reducing the hazards of workplaces have lately acquired importance in the thinking of Government, management and labour the world over. The subject of safety and health is one where there can be no quarrel among the three parties. This Seminar, I believe, is the first one ever organised by the Singapore Manufacturers Association on the topic. It is therefore

~~It is therefore~~ commendable that your Association has organised this Seminar with the expressed purpose of promoting Industrial Safety and Health, particularly among your members. Although, in the context of Singapore's 17-year history of industrialisation, it is somewhat belated, nevertheless it is of significance that manufacturers have now come to realise and to publicly declare their concern for the welfare of their workers.

4 Seminars are useful means for informing and instructing participants. Looking over your programme for the two days, I note that you will be discussing a whole range of different types of hazards, such as electrical, fire, explosions, toxic chemicals and mechanical hazards. Some emphasis is being placed on fire, perhaps, because in the recent past, fire has been responsible not only for the loss of life and limbs of people but also because of damage to property and materials. It seems strange that despite the modern scientific and technological advancements of the last century, fire remains a deadly enemy to modern man as it was to ancient man. Quite rightly, it is an enemy that must not be underestimated and should occupy some prominence in your deliberations.

5 Leaving fire aside, an analysis of the factory accidents statistics by cause over the last 3 years indicate that 'machinery moved by mechanical power' has consistently occupied the top position followed by 'persons falling' and being 'struck by falling bodies'. It is therefore important for the Seminar to focus its attention to mechanical hazards. Ever since machines

/were invited and

were invented and harnessed for industrial use, they have been a primary cause of injury to the workers. Industries cannot do without machines for production and therefore more emphasis must be placed in installing safety measures on the machines themselves as well as on the proper instruction and training of new and inexperienced workers in the handling of these machines with due care. Otherwise, it may not be possible to reduce the hazards posed by this particular top cause of factory accidents.

6 While fire and machine hazards are both visible and obvious to everyone, I am also glad to see that you are also giving some attention to the unseen enemies in the working environment, such as dust, fumes, vapours and other toxic chemicals which are not so obvious as hazards and do not often cause damage or disease to the bodies at an instant or kill as dramatically as an explosion. Nevertheless, through prolonged periods of exposure, these toxic substances after gaining entry into the body can cause certain occupational diseases.

7 For such less obvious adverse factors, the problem lies in the recognition of the hazards and I hope some emphasis would be placed in teaching people not only to see obvious hazards but also to recognise the unseen and more subtle hazards in the workplace. From recognition, the next step must be to utilise our technical and scientific knowledge to institute measures to control these hazards with the aim of protecting workers from them.

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8 It is my hope that the Seminar will not just be a forum for the declaration of good intentions. Rather, it should lead you to accent safety and health as an integral part of management functions. Once there is this acceptance, a safety and health policy can be worked out. Safety officers should be given proper importance and their recommendations for safety due consideration. Your Association should take the lead in encouraging your members and other industrialists to implement wherever possible the necessary environmental and other measures in their own plants. It should also monitor the safety and health situation in industry, identify the problems and assist, with the help of Government and other bodies, industry to solve such problems. A safe and healthy working environment is a goal accepted by the Government, management and labour. I am confident that employers will make their contributions to the attainment of this objective.

9 I have great pleasure now in declaring this Seminar on Industrial Safety and Health open.