

Speech by Mr. Tang See Chim, Minister of State
for Finance, at the opening of the 8th
Industrial Safety Seminar on 17.12.70.

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I am indeed pleased to be here this afternoon to officiate at this 8th Industrial Safety Seminar organised by the National Safety First Council of Singapore. The Council deserves our congratulations for the very effective role it is playing in the promotion of safety first measures in Singapore. Its further concentration on the promotion of industrial safety measures is no small credit to its sensitivity for sizing up the areas of great need during this very important period of our country's industrial development and economic growth.

2. According to statistics*collected by E.D.B., the number of industrial establishments have increased from about 1,000 in 1965 to over 1,700 in 1969, an increase of some 70%. The number of workers employed nearly doubled - from 47,000 in 1965 to nearly 90,000 in 1969. The value of industrial products increased more than 1½ times -
in 1965
from \$1,100 million to more than \$2,600 million in 1969.

3. In order to keep up with the keen competition of the international export market, not only must we try to produce items fair in price compared with other countries, but we must also attain quality with mass production. These standards are only achievable by the introduction of modern machinery, most of which are highly sophisticated and complex and in the main are driven by electrical power.

4. Electricity consumption (in million kilowatt hours) by industries and commerce is as follows:-

1965	-	470.1
1966	-	582.0
1967	-	718.9
1968	-	903.4
1969	-	1,057.9

Jan. - Oct. 1970 - 1,033.9

*excluding small firms with less than 10 workers and rubber processing

You can see that the consumption of electricity has more than doubled in the last five years. (P.U.B. statistics).

5. Electricity is a most versatile form of power. Properly harnessed, it is a docile and useful servant working for the benefit of mankind. Carelessly used, it can kill and maim.

6. The following are the statistics of industrial accidents in factories over the period 1965 to 1969:-

1965	-	529
1966	-	854
1967	-	799
1968	-	823
1969	-	1,217

No separate figures are available for accidents directly caused by electricity, although in the Ministry of Labour Annual Report for 1969 it was reported that electricity caused four industrial accidents, three of which were fatal and one resulted in permanent disability (Table XL1). In the same Report, awards of Workmen's compensation were given as follows:-

	<u>Fatal Accident Cases</u>	<u>Permanent Disablement Cases</u>	<u>Temporary Disablement Cases</u>	<u>Total</u>
1965	- \$158,669.20	\$389,453.01	\$216,619.54	\$764,721.75
1966	- \$424,475.90	\$376,112.99	\$182,073.93	\$982,663.82
1967	- \$288,849.33	\$386,085.12	\$222,725.92	\$897,660.37
1968	- \$289,240.72	\$475,014.72	\$249,937.78	\$1,014,194.22
1969	- \$431,216.28	\$503,350.33	\$270,450.03	\$1,205,026.64

While the above figures do not tell us the industrial accident rates caused by electricity, they do indicate that accident rates in factories are on the increase. These industrial accidents result in heavy loss not only to the country in terms of wastage of trained human resources and manpower of which we are in acute short supply, but also

have their equally detrimental and negative effects on the operations of industries through loss of manpower, re-training and payment of workmen's compensation, resulting in high costs. Not only are industrial accidents a loss and wastage which our nation and the industrialist cannot afford, but accidents often disable or even result in death and bring about undue social hardship and distress to the families of the affected. When accidents are serious resulting in severe disabilities such as the loss of limbs, sight, hearing, etc., retraining or vocational rehabilitation is slow and costly and, in most cases, the injured person is unable to return to his original level of work performance. This would cause economic and social hardship and dislocation of family life affecting other members of the family: e.g. a working wife is required to stop work in order to look after the husband, children to leave school in order to help supplement the family income, or the housewife ^{is forced} to go into employment leaving young children unattended.

7. Thus we can see that one accident of a worker in a factory has its consequential repercussions on the economic and social welfare of our society. It is without question that we in Singapore, whether employer or worker whose livelihood and well-being are so much tied up with a rapidly industrialising economy, must take every precaution towards the elimination of all dangerous consequences of electrical operations which so far seem to be the most prevalent types of motive power in industries today.

8. I hope that the participants of this Seminar, many of whom I understand are supervisors and executives from industries and ^{experts} in the field of safety first and on the use of electric-powered machinery, will take this opportunity

not only to spread the need for safety precautions against accidents but that in your detailed deliberations and analysis you will come forth with some concrete and practical recommendations and solutions on how to prevent and alleviate the economically and socially disruptive acts of industrial accidents which have been on the increase in recent years.

9. I now have great pleasure in declaring the 8th Industrial Safety Seminar open.