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SPEECH BY DR AHMAD MATAR, ACTING MINISTER FOR SOCIAL AFFAIRS,  
AT THE FIRE-FIGHTING TRAINING COURSE GRADUATION CEREMONY OF  
SHELL EASTERN PETROLEUM LIMITED HELD AT PULAU BUKOM  
ON WEDNESDAY, 20 DECEMBER 1978 AT 4.00 P.M.

Fire-safety in general and in manufacturing establishments in particular is of vital interest to everyone. Manufacturing establishments contain valuable production machinery and stocks of raw materials and they also employ large numbers of people. The potential damage and loss of life that can be caused by fires in such premises can take on immense proportions.

In 1977, out of 772 fires involving buildings, 91 or about 12 per cent occurred in manufacturing establishments. The value of losses caused by these fires was estimated at \$8.7 million out of the estimated total of about \$16.4 million of fire losses in building fires taken as a whole. For the first ten months of 1978, the corresponding figures were 123 fires in manufacturing establishments out of 921 building fires and \$5.4 million of estimated damage out of \$16.7 million. In proportion to the number of fires, the damage caused by fires in manufacturing plants is quite high. I might add that the estimates of fire losses is computed only on actual property damaged or destroyed. They do not take into account consequential losses of production capacity or the potential job-loss.

On the whole, the fire-safety record of Singapore's petroleum installations has been good. The management of petroleum companies, knowing the high fire-risks posed by their particular production processes and materials, display a high degree of concern and consciousness on the subject of fire-protection. They have traditionally maintained in-house fire brigades which are entrusted with the responsibility of fire-protection in the

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installations operated by these companies. These brigades cooperate closely with the Singapore Fire Brigade by providing the vital initial efforts pending the back-up of the public fire service. There are operational plans drawn up in consultation whereby the Singapore Fire Brigade is alerted and, if necessary, called upon to turn out to the scene.

Such cooperation, awareness and concern on the part of the corporate public needs to be matched by similar consciousness and cooperation on the part of the general public, which, sad to say, is often lacking. For example, it is not uncommon to find ignorant, or perhaps recalcitrant motorists and petrol station attendants smoking at petrol stations, in flagrant disregard of the "No Smoking" signs prominently displayed in such places. These signs are put up to remind those who smoke that it is an offence to do so at petrol stations. Any carelessness or negligence could result in a conflagration, leading to unnecessary property damage and loss of life. I would like to see much more cooperation from the general public and particularly motorists and station attendants in this simple matter of fire-prevention at petrol stations.

The cooperation of the public is also necessary to ensure that the resources of the Fire Brigade are not so unduly taxed as to place undue strains on them. In this connection, the Singapore Fire Brigade has noticed that of late a large number of calls has been made requesting its services to open the doors of flats where the occupants have inadvertently locked themselves out. Up to the end of September 1978, the Brigade has responded to 135 such calls compared with 58 such calls for the whole of 1977. By being called to render these door-opening services, the Brigade's readiness to respond to actual fires is indirectly affected, since men have to be sent out to attend to the call. It is unnecessary to call the Fire Brigade to open locked doors and in fact it is not the Brigade's function to answer such requests, unless there is a danger of fire. In any case, the Brigade does not have any special equipment or tools to render such a service and inevitably, when they arrive they have to ask the occupant whether he would consent to having his door broken and undertake to make good the necessary repairs himself. There are other alternatives for house occupants

to turn to, such as the respective building managements in the case of residents of private apartments, and the respective Area Offices or the Essential Maintenance Services Unit in the case of those residing in HDB flats. It goes without saying that if residents took a little more care, they would not find themselves in such situations in the first place.

It now gives me great pleasure to congratulate the trainees of this training course and to remind them that the training in basic fire-safety and fire-fighting measures will be of benefit to them since they are working in an environment where fires are an ever-present danger. Although the trainees are not themselves part of the fulltime fire-fighting personnel in Shell, this training will ensure that they are able to supplement the efforts of the fulltime fire-fighters.

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