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SPEECH BY MR CHAI CHONG YII, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR
EDUCATION, AT THE OFFICIAL LAUNCHING OF THE HOME SAFETY
WORKBOOK CONTEST AT THE HWA CHONG JUNIOR COLLEGE ON
SATURDAY, 7 JULY 1979 AT 11.00 AM

We all are familiar with the phrase "Home sweet home". Home is the place we all love. It soothes our tired senses when we return from workplaces at the end of the day. We all believe that it is the safest place we can find. However, the statistics of accident figures printed on page 6 of the workbook "Home Safety Contest" will give you a shock. You will discover that more accidents happen at homes than on public roads. Though I find it difficult to believe, yet it is a fact. The figures clearly show that in 1977, home accidents seen and treated in Government hospitals totalled 17,624 cases. Listed below that is the figure 13,765, being the total number of cases for traffic accidents in the same year.

Of course, the nature and severity of these two types of accident are different, but this does not alter the fact that we live with numerous hazards in our homes. A few of these hazards such as hot water and fire have been with us for centuries. We sometimes forget that they pose real dangers to our young but inquisitive children. More risks are brought to our homes with the introduction of modern household gadgets and electrical appliances. Many of us do not read the instructions accompanying them, especially the pages on safety and precaution. These risks are the nature of things. We cannot help acquiring them, but we can easily prevent them from harming us if we know what and where they are. A little bit of habitual precaution to check the occurrence of an accident is always better than unlimited hours of regret after it has happened.

Statistics further show that 60 per cent of home accidents happen to children under 12 years of age. A large proportion of them must be our primary pupils. I believe our teachers can help reduce this number by inculcating in their pupils a sense of safety consciousness whenever

there is an opportunity to do so. Whether, the victims of home accidents are school children or pre-school children, the primary responsibility clearly lies with their parents. All parents as a rule would not like to see accident happen to their children. But why are there so many accidents happening at home? The answer I can think of is either carelessness or ignorance on the part of parents. Our home is the most familiar place in our life. We know every inch of it. We sometimes walk from one corner to another almost subconsciously. Such is the extent of familiarity that we stop thinking of possible risks. We live with a false sense of security which blinds us from seeing any danger until it is too late. Knowing this human weakness, we must be alert all the time.

I congratulate the National Safety First Council of Singapore for their efforts to reduce home accidents. With inherent human weaknesses, it is not possible to eliminate all accidents at homes. But I am confident that with a bit of extra care, we can definitely make our home a much safer place for ourselves and our children.

With this note, it is now my pleasure to launch this Home Safety Workbook Contest.
