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SPEECH BY MR CHIN HARN TONG, SENIOR PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY,
MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS, AT THE OPENING OF
THE FIRE PREVENTION EXHIBITION AT THE PARKWAY PARADE
ON SUNDAY, 7 JUNE 1987 AT 11.00 AM

Year after year, human lives were lost and property damaged by fire mishaps. In the last 10 years up to 1986, we had more than 55,900 fires. 218 persons died, more than 1,200 were injured and a staggering \$383 million worth of property went up in smoke.

In the first three months of this year, a total of 1,597 fires were reported. One person was killed, another 21 were injured and property worth \$6.3 million were destroyed.

An analysis by the Fire Service of its 1986 fire records has revealed some interesting facts on the types of occupancies which are most vulnerable to fires and the common causes of fires.

The analysis shows that, of the 5,306 fires that broke out in 1986, 2,198 or 42 per cent were in fact residential fires - making residential premises to have recorded the most number of fires.

In examining the general causes of all fires, it has been found that nearly nine out of every 10 fires took place through carelessness, ignorance or apathy.

The main causes of fires are the indiscriminate disposal of lighted cigarette butts, burning matchsticks and embers; misuse of electricity and overheating of food left

unattended on lighted stoves. These alone accounted for 74 per cent of all the fires.

Since the majority of fires is caused by human error, it is only logical that the only way to eliminate such unwanted fires is through paying greater attention to fire prevention.

To this end, the Singapore Fire Service has on-going programmes to educate members of the public on the rudiments of fire safety. This includes conducting talks and demonstrations on simple fire-fighting and first-aid for employees of departmental stores, supermarkets, hotels and factories.

In March 1986, the National Fire Prevention Council (NFPC) was formed to promote fire safety consciousness. This Council comprises representatives mainly from the private sector including the hotel and insurance industry, the newspaper industry and various professional groups such as accountants, architects and engineers. With its diverse representation, I am confident that the Council would reach out to a wide audience in spreading the fire safety message.

The NFPC is now embarking on a major drive to propagate the fire safety message nation-wide. This exhibition is part of that drive on fire prevention and will subsequently be staged in the various housing estates. The exhibition will highlight the common causes of fire and educate the population on how to prevent fire mishaps.

This is a laudable exercise and I commend the organisers for their effort. However, all these efforts would be futile if members of the public continue to believe fire prevention is solely the Fire Service's responsibility and not theirs. The NFPC and the Singapore Fire Service have taken the first step.

Fire prevention actually means preventing a fire from getting out of control. As I have stated earlier, most fires in Singapore occur because someone allows the fire to get out of control. Lightning and other natural elements do cause fires but they are rare events. In the end, it is up to each of us to prevent fires by observing the basic rules of fire safety. I would like to urge the members of the public to play their part by being more fire safety conscious and learning how to prevent fire.

On this note, I now have great pleasure in declaring this exhibition open.

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