

Singapore Government **PRESS RELEASE**

Information Division, Ministry of Culture, City Hall, Singapore 0617 • TEL: 3378191 ext 352, 353, 354 / 3362207 / 3362271

Archives & Oral History Department
Singapore

15 APR 1983

Acc No	NARC
83	0052 9

11-1/83/04/10

SPEECH BY MR CHUA SIAN CHIN, MINISTER FOR HOME AFFAIRS,
AT THE DEMONSTRATION-CUM-TRAINING FOR HOUSEWIVES ON
FIRE FIGHTING AT THE MACPHERSON COMMUNITY CENTRE
ON SUNDAY, 10 APRIL 1983 AT 4 PM

Two weeks ago at the RC/SBC Road Show held here in MacPherson I announced that we had launched the second phase of our Civil Defence recruitment exercise. It was to cover the rest of our residents concentrating in particular on the recruitment of our housewives. It was to be a massive exercise conducted by way of house to house visits by Residents' Committee (RC) members and other community leaders. Our objective is to get almost every housewife to learn how to use a fire extinguisher.

Today's large gathering of women volunteers from MacPherson for this first demonstration-cum-training session on how to use the fire extinguisher clearly shows that the response to the recruitment exercise is overwhelming. This is most encouraging and should ensure the success of our Civil Defence build-up of civilian volunteers not only in MacPherson, but also in other constituencies. I understand that to date nearly 3,000 of the women residents in MacPherson have volunteered. We expect more to join in.

Our women volunteers must form the major component of our civilian volunteer Civil Defence Force. This is because in the event of war or armed conflict, all our men who are combat fit will be away at the battle front. Further, as a result of the growing destructive power of modern weapons causing widespread devastation, more and more civilians are killed in their homes. The ratio of civilian to military

casualties rose from 1:20 in the First World War to 10:1 in the various wars between 1950 and 1980. Thus, in the event of war, women who remain at home will have to bear the brunt of the casualties. It is therefore crucial that we should get more and more women involved in Civil Defence. We need to prepare and train them to help themselves and each other in the event of such a disaster. Only in this way can we prevent panic and ensure orderly evacuation and thus minimise loss of lives and property.

The Civil Defence training we give to our housewives will also be extremely useful to them to meet hazards and emergencies such as fires in their homes. According to statistics from our Fire Service, for a period of 15 months ending 31 March 1980, out of 1,336 fires occurring in buildings in Singapore, 944 or 70 per cent of the cases occurred in homes. As for injuries and deaths caused to housewives and their family by these fires, in 1982 there were 55 injured and one dead. For the past two months of 1983, eight persons were injured by fires in homes. Most of these fires could have been put out and prevented from causing injury and further damage if the person at home had and was able to use a fire extinguisher.

The objective of our present exercise is to teach almost every housewife how to use a fire extinguisher. It is very easy to learn and will not take much time as will be demonstrated here for all to see. I understand that today more than 500 housewives will be taught how to use a fire extinguisher. Each of them will not take more than one to two minutes to learn how to extinguish a fire. The fire extinguisher that will be used is the BCF type. Its size is no bigger than a large size can of insect spray which housewives use against cockroaches in the kitchen. Its gross weight is only two kilos which is much lighter than the usual weight of purchases which our housewives carry home in their marketing basket. It is a simple-to-operate,

multi-purpose light fire extinguisher that is used nowadays.

I have described in detail the fire extinguishers in use nowadays in order to dispel the misconception that fire extinguishers are heavy and bulky things which the average housewife has not got the strength to carry and operate. It is true that the old model extinguishers are bigger and heavier. The present BCF extinguisher uses a chemical agent. It can be used against all types of fires including those caused by oil, gas and electricity without posing any danger to the user. On the other hand, oil fires should not be put out by using water for it could scald the person doing it.

Besides clearing the misconceptions I would also like to reveal what plans we are considering in making available fire extinguishers and at a cost low enough for every household to be able to afford them. At the moment the market price of a BCF extinguisher is about \$75 each. To lower the costs, the Ministry of Home Affairs is thinking of purchasing them in bulk on consignment through some agency and in conjunction with the Civil Defence Command and RCs to retail them at non-profit rates. We are also considering some form of arrangement to be made for the extinguishers to be purchased and paid for by way of small instalments. One of the advantages of the latest model of extinguishers is that they can be kept almost indefinitely without the need for regular refill or servicing. However, the Ministry of Home Affairs through the Fire Service is also studying how it can organise a programme to service and refill fire extinguishers at low costs.

As a follow-up of today's demonstration-cum-training session on the use of fire extinguishers, a basic fire-fighting training programme has been devised for housewives who because of other commitments cannot spare the time to be

a volunteer in the Volunteer Civil Defence Units (VCDU). It will be just a one-session training of about 45 minutes which includes a film show on fire hazards in the kitchen. They will be taught the various types of fire hazards and the respective preventive measures. This training programme for housewives will immediately be introduced to the rest of the 14 constituencies in the pilot scheme. The housewives of MacPherson can thus be proud to have set a good example for the rest of Singapore to follow.

In conclusion I would like to commend the MacPherson Civil Defence Co-ordinating Committee, the RCs and other community leaders for the magnificent effort they have put in to make it possible for this massive turnout of women residents of MacPherson to participate in our National Civil Defence effort.
