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EMBARGOED UNTIL DELIVERY

SPEECH BY DR ONG CHIT CHUNG, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY  
(HOME AFFAIRS & LABOUR) AT THE MINISTRY OF LABOUR'S  
SAFETY PERFORMANCE AWARDS PRESENTATION CEREMONY HELD  
ON 17 DEC 91 AT CARLTON HALL, 2ND LEVEL YORK HOTEL  
AT 0930 HOURS

Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am indeed happy to be here at this ceremony to recognise and honour organisations that have put in extraordinary efforts to safeguard the safety and health of their workers. It is heartening to know that the efforts of the Ministry to encourage factories to self-regulate for safety are bearing fruit.

Now, more and more accept that the prevention of accidents and diseases at the workplace is the responsibility of all, including the top management. But, this was not always the case.

In the early days of industrialisation, many accidents happened because of poor working conditions. Unsafe conditions, such as poor housekeeping, obstructed passageways, non-provision of safety barriers, and unstable stacking of

materials, were the main causes of accidents. Today, workplaces are less accident prone. This has been achieved as a result of concerted action by the government, management and workers to address the problem.

Over the years, the Factories Act was periodically revised to keep pace with developments. Many new provisions were incorporated. In addition, inspections of factories were stepped up. The Ministry also introduced safety training courses for management, supervisors and workers. Educational activities, including safety campaigns and exhibitions, were organised to highlight the importance of industrial safety and health.

These measures led to much improved safety standards in industry. Records of the DIS showed that the number of accidents reported to the department decreased by 38% from 6,045 cases in 1980 to 3,856 cases in 1986. The accident frequency rate, which is the number of accidents per million man-hours worked, also decreased from 6.5 to 4.0 over the same period. -

After 1986, however, there was a rising trend. Last year, the number of reported accidents increased to 4,889 cases. Of these cases, 119 were permanent disablement accidents and 56 were fatal accidents. Clearly, despite the improvements, more can and should be done.

The problem cannot be solved by more legislation or enforcement. The elimination of unsafe conditions and the promotion of safety at the workplace must be accorded top priority by senior management. Management must devise and maintain a good safety management system.

Such a system must have a proper safety policy and an effective safety committee. It must also spell out accountability for safety and operating procedures and establish internal safety regulations. Safety training should be an integral part of the regular activities of the organisations.

While a good number of factories have already established safety management systems, there is always room for improvement. Results of recent audits carried out by the DIS indicated that many factories which employ 50 or more workers have yet to set up proper safety management systems.

Of the 162 factories audited last year, 78 (48%) did not have a safety policy. More than half (55%) of the factories did not have a proper safety plan with set goals and targets. However, most of the factories (90%) had formed safety committees and more than 79% of the factories had appointed safety officers.

To encourage factories to self-regulate, the Ministry of Labour has embarked on a series of training workshops for managements to set up proper safety management systems. The Occupational Safety and Health (Training and Promotion) Centre of the DIS is conducting these one-day workshops. To date, more than 160 management representatives from factories have participated.

The DIS will also be conducting periodic safety management audits of factories to monitor progress on the setting up of proper safety management systems in factories. During these audits, the DIS officers will hold discussions with top management and will try to persuade and encourage them to review and give the highest priority to safety policies.

The prevention of accidents in the workplace must be an on-going exercise. It must keep pace with changes in industry. New processes and technology bring with them new hazards. These must be identified and dealt with. We cannot afford to be complacent. Apart from humanitarian considerations, it makes good economic sense to invest in making the workplace safe for workers. Such investments will reap good dividends. Expenses can be reduced considerably as a result of fewer accidents. A safe and healthy working environment will definitely help to boost morale amongst the workforce. This, in turn, leads to higher productivity.

Finally, I congratulate all the award recipients for setting such exemplary standards in accident prevention. Please keep up your good work, and may you be the flag bearers of safety at the workplace.

Thank you.

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Gen D2:Speech.OCC