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SPEECH BY DR ONG CHIT CHUNG, PARLIAMENTARY SECRETARY (HOME AFFAIRS AND LABOUR), AT THE OPENING OF THE CONSTRUCTION SAFETY CAMPAIGN 1992, ORGANISED BY THE SINGAPORE CONTRACTORS ASSOCIATION LTD., AT THE SINGAPORE CONTRACTORS' ASSOCIATION AUDITORIUM, 1 BUKIT MERAH LANE 2, 1 SEP 92, 9 AM.

Mr Chairman; Ladies & Gentlemen

I am very pleased to see all of you here today in enthusiastic support of this safety campaign.

Many people perceive the construction industry as hazardous and associate it with unsafe workplaces and accidents. This is an age-old perception, perhaps dating back to the 60's and 70's when the work environment was indeed bad.

As you know, there was a rapid expansion of the construction industry in the 60's and 70's. Contractors who were used to constructing only shophouses, walk-up flats and low-rise residential buildings now had to construct highrise hotels, commercial buildings, HDB flats and flyovers. Many contractors and workers were ill-equipped to cope with the problems arising from such highrise construction. Safety provisions at site were lacking. Consequently, there was a sharp rise in worksite accidents during this period.

Since then, we have come a long way in improving safety conditions at construction worksites. More comprehensive safety requirements were brought to the worksite when the Ministry of Labour introduced the Building Operations and Work of Engineering Construction Regulations in the early 70's. Efforts were also made to promote worksite safety through safety campaigns and training.

Since 1983, the safety campaign for the construction industry has been held annually. Training for workers and supervisors from the construction industry has also been stepped up with the setting up

of the Occupational Safety and Health (Training and Promotion) Centre in the Ministry in 1990. The Centre now runs a permanent exhibition centre on occupational safety and health.

Annually, the Ministry presents awards to give recognition to those factories and worksites that have proper safety management systems and have achieved good accident-free records.

Accident statistics show that these efforts have paid off. The number of accidents fell from 1085 cases in 1981 to 802 cases in 1991. There was also a drop

in the frequency of accidents during this period, from 5.6 accidents per million man-hours worked in 1981 to 3.9 in 1991.

However, there has been no reduction in the number of serious accidents. The number of fatal accidents in fact increased from 28 cases in 1981 to 35 cases in 1991. Serious accidents are still a major cause of concern, especially when such accidents can assume disasterous proportions.

I have been told by officers from the Department of Industrial Safety that these serious accidents are usually caused by someone who does something unsafe at the

time of the accident. For instance, a worker will use a makeshift platform because it is too troublesome for him to construct a proper one; others may throw debris over the side of a building because it is more convenient than disposing of it through the waste chute designed for the purpose.

The key to controlling unsafe acts is safety training and promotion. To begin with, every construction worker should be given a proper orientation on safety at the worksite. My Ministry's Department of Industrial Safety has been running such orientation courses for construction workers since November, 1982.

I must add that safety training for construction workers must not stop at safety orientation courses. Safety orientation only provides the worker with the fundamentals or the starting point. Relevant safety messages must be constantly reinforced in order to inculcate in our workers the right attitude towards safety. Safety measures must be drilled in until they become second nature to the workers. Safety should be a way of life at the worksite. This can be done in many ways.

It can be in the form of "tool-box" meetings held at the beginning of every work shift where the foreman or kepala

would brief his team of workers on the work to be done and the safety precautions to be taken. I am told that many contractors in the industry have adopted this practice. I urge other contractors who have not done so to follow suit.

Your slogan for this campaign: "Safety starts with me" is very apt. It highlights the responsibility of every individual in ensuring safety at work, regardless of whether he is a worker, supervisor, manager or safety officer. Some think that safety is the responsibility of only the safety officer. Others feel that as workers are the ones carrying out the work, so naturally, work

safety should be the worker's responsibility.

As your campaign slogan reaffirms, "Safety starts with me". If everyone at the worksite thinks and acts this way, safety will never be compromised.

I understand that you have organised a very comprehensive programme for this year's campaign, including a mobile safety exhibition and a seminar. I would like to commend you for that. I hope that your efforts to promote safety at construction worksites will continue throughout the year and I wish you every success.

It now gives me great pleasure to
declare this campaign open.

Thank you.

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