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SPEECH BY DR ONG CHIT CHUNG, PARLIAMENTARY
SECRETARY (HOME AFFAIRS & LABOUR) & MP FOR BUKIT
BATOK, AT THE SECOND INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE AND
EXHIBITION ON SAFETY, HEALTH AND LOSS PREVENTION
IN THE OIL, CHEMICAL AND PROCESS INDUSTRIES ON 16
FEB 1993 AT THE PAN PACIFIC HOTEL AT 7.30 PM

Mr Chairman

Ladies and Gentlemen:

1. I am pleased to be here this evening at this opening ceremony of the Second International Conference and Exhibition on "Safety, Health and Loss Prevention in the Oil, Chemical and Process Industries".

2. I understand that this is the second of such conference, the first being held in Singapore nearly 3 years ago.

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I am impressed that this conference has drawn some 250 participants from 20 countries.

Among you are distinguished leaders in industry, government officials academics and experts in the field of safety and loss prevention, risk assessment and environmental protection.

3. To those of you who have come from overseas, I extend to you a warm welcome and wish you a very pleasant stay in Singapore.

To the Chairman and members of the Organising Committee, I congratulate you on the hard work and efforts that were

put in in organising this international conference.

4. The importance of this conference cannot be over-emphasised. In the last decade, there were a number of disasters which resulted in severe consequences and high fatalities.

The most terrible in recent memory was the disaster at the Union Carbide plant in Bhopal in 1984, where the sudden release of methylisocyanide (a highly toxic gas) resulted in 2,500 deaths and at least ten times that number injured.

In Mexico and Spain, releases and ignition

of liquified petroleum gas (LPG) in open areas had caused the loss of many lives. Fortunately so far, Singapore has been spared of such mishaps.

5. According to the records of the Ministry of Labour's Department of Industrial Safety (DIS), there are 14 oil/petrochemical companies in Singapore. Together, they employ about 4,300 workers.

In the past 5 years (1988 - 1992), 75 accidents were reported to the DIS from oil/petrochemical companies, of which 2 were fatal. For the chemical processing

industry, there are 336 registered factories employing about 13,000 workers. In the past 5 years, a total of about 560 accidents were reported to the DIS, of which 8 were fatal.

6. Compared to the more hazardous industries like the shipbuilding and repairing industry and the construction industry, the accident rate in the oil/chemical and process industries is relatively good.

7. However, we cannot afford to overlook the danger signs which are showing.

For instance, in 1988, there was a major Naphtha tank fire in a local refinery.

Fortunately, the fire was brought under control without any loss of life.

8. There can be no room for complacency.

The oil/petrochemical industry is by nature potentially hazardous. Severe processing conditions such as high pressure and high temperature put tremendous strain on the plants.

With such plants growing in size, the concentration of energy stored in them has been increasing tremendously. The dangers of large scale fires and explosions are ever present and the adequacy of existing systems to control such mishaps is a constant cause of concern.

9. Another area which requires serious attention is the control of contract workers.

In the oil/petrochemical industry, it is a common practice to engage contract workers to carry out maintenance work and to do some of the more labour-

intensive day-to-day work.

Contract workers cannot be expected to have the same level of discipline and values as the direct workers who have gone through rigorous safety training and orientation programmes.

These contract workers are usually unskilled or semi-skilled with low education levels. They must be properly briefed on the safety control systems and be closely supervised to ensure that they follow the correct work procedures.

10. The management of hazards associated with processes using highly hazardous chemicals cannot be taken lightly.

There is now a growing international trend for such plants to develop a process safety management system to effectively control such hazards.

Such a system must take into account the technology of the plant, process and materials, personnel training, regular maintenance and quality assurance of equipment/facilities.

There must also be preparedness for emergencies. In this regard, companies

must liaise closely with the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Environment and the Singapore Civil Defence Force so that emergency responses are well co-ordinated.

It is essential that the process safety management systems are subject to regular audits to ensure that the system is properly implemented.

11. The key to improving the standards of safety and health in the oil/petrochemical and process industry is not through more government or statutory control, but through self-regulation.

Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the industry to take all necessary measures to ensure the safety and health of their workers in the workplace.

Management must manage work safety in the same organised and systematic way as they would manage production, finance and other assets of the company.

12. Professional organisations such as your Society for Loss Prevention, as well as educational institutions like the National University of Singapore, play an important role.

You can help industries set higher

standards for safety and health and
continue to organise safety workshops
and conferences to help raise all-round
awareness and strengthen the industry's
capability in accident and disaster
prevention.

13. On that note, it gives me great
pleasure in declaring the conference open,
and I wish you every success in your
deliberations. Thank you.

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