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SPEECH BY MR ONG PANG BOON, MINISTER FOR LABOUR, AT  
THE OPENING CEREMONY OF THE 2ND MANAGEMENT WORKSHOP  
ON SAFETY IN SHIPYARDS HELD AT SHANGRI-LA HOTEL ON  
FRIDAY, 2 DECEMBER 1977 AT 9.00 AM

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The Second Management Workshop on Safety, sponsored by the Advisory Committee, on Accident Prevention in the Shipbuilding and Repairing Industry, brings together for the first time top management, union officials and contractors to deliberate on the issue of safety in our shipyards. It is a reflection of the resolve of the industry to strengthen its safety management.

I am pleased to note from the first report of the Advisory Committee that many shipyards have already formulated their safety policies, thus showing their commitment to safety. Without such a commitment, it would be difficult for shipyards to begin systematic development of adequate preventive measures. A survey conducted this year has shown that many shipyards have introduced a number of basic measures such as the provision of safety equipment and facilities, the display of suitable safety signs and notices, attendance by shipyard personnel of specialised and general safety courses, and the introduction of permit-to-work systems. Such measures have helped shipyards to develop the capacity to improve on their safety record and to reduce the number of fires, explosions and asphyxiations which have caused many deaths in the past. What is needed now is to consolidate and strengthen such preventive measures. In particular there must be constant monitoring and surveillance. Such vigilance is especially needed during heightened activities or near festive seasons and holidays so that in the rush to meet schedules lives are not lost and injuries caused. Safety monitoring and surveillance must become a normal daily routine. Any relaxation can result in another major mishap.

In recent years, our shipyards have to diversify their activities to cope with a depressed tanker market. They have turned from construction of vessels and oil rigs to repairs and conversion of vessels.

Moreover, specialised vessels such as the LNG and LPG\* tankers have also called in for repairs. There are peak months when shipyards experience a sudden influx of tankers and other vessels. This kind of situation imposes a strain on manpower. Many new contract workers have therefore to be recruited. Some of these new workers have little or no previous experience of working in shipbuilding or repairing, let alone the ability to comply with safety regulations of shipyards. In such a situation, it is clear that stringent monitoring and surveillance by the safety departments alone is inadequate. There must also be advanced planning to anticipate such a situation. These distinct changes in operations and new demands for specialised services will require additional safety measures. In short, safety planning and management must be given the same degree of attention as production. It is timely that the subject of ventilation as well as safety measures on repairs of LNG and LPG tankers will be considered at this workshop.

Until now much emphasis has been devoted to safety in confined spaces of vessels with the main objective of rendering the environment free of toxic, inflammable and explosive substances so that confined spaces are safe for hot work. At this workshop attention will also be focussed on scaffolding, staging and the use of safety belts and safety nets. This area deserves some attention because records have shown that fatal cases due to drowning and falls are also high. For the period from 1974 to 1976, fatalities due to drowning claimed 7 lives and falls from heights 17 lives.

With the growth and expansion of the industry, the number of contract workers has also increased from about 1,900 in 1970 to 8,000 in 1977. This is an increase of more than fourfold. It becomes imperative that safety discipline must be enforced on all contract workers if your safety programmes are not to produce only partial solutions. This was already realised at the First Management Workshop and I am glad that since then a number of positive steps have been taken to ensure that contract workers comply with safety requirements. These steps have culminated in contractors undertaking in writing to observe a number of safety measures. An important undertaking is the acceptance by contractors

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\* LNG = Liquefied natural gas  
LPG = Liquefied petroleum gas

that contract workers who have not passed the safety orientation course by March 1978 will not be allowed to work in shipyards. With the shipyards ensuring that the undertaking is carried out, the industry has established an important basis for safety control and discipline.

Despite adverse market conditions and price under-cutting during the last couple of years, the shipbuilding and repairing industry has been able to maintain its yearly increase in sales in the last 3 years: \$760 m. in 1974, \$980 m. in 1975 and \$1,250 m. in 1976. The increase over 1975 is estimated at about 28 per cent. Even though 1976 was a much busier year, the total number of accidents recorded was 1,095, which is slightly lower than the figure of 1,142 registered in 1975. But the decrease in severity rates from 4,247 in 1974 to 2,347 in 1975 and 1,072 in 1976 was attributed mainly to the corresponding decline in the number of fatalities: from 38 in 1974 to 22 in 1975 and 15 in 1976. The improvement in the accident records in this industry is due in the main to the number of positive measures that have been taken by all concerned. However, the number of accidents registered for the first 10 months of this year is 982 including 13 fatalities. It therefore seems to me that further improvement in safety performance is not likely to be achieved unless firstly, additional safety measures are introduced in shipyards; and secondly, the industry applies modern management techniques to its safety management. The former will be the subject of your Management Workshop later this morning. As for the latter, one must continually reappraise the approach taken in the light of changes that have to be made from time to time in the industry.

In the already adverse market conditions there must be safety and productivity in the industry. Shipyards must ensure that the great efforts which have already been expended on safety and health measures must be rendered effective. It is no longer sufficient to adopt a compartmentalised approach and leave safety to the concern of only the safety department. A system must therefore be devised to integrate safety with other major sectors of the industry. Safety measures must be integrated into the management and operation systems in order to render accident prevention effective. The challenge that is before us now is whether we can develop an effective systems approach to bring about a more lasting solution to our industrial safety and health problems.

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$$* \text{ Severity Rate} = \frac{\text{Total Man-days lost} \text{ (or charged)} \times 1,000,000}{\text{Total Number of Man-hours worked}}$$

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