



DAILY INFORMATION BULLETIN

Sunday, November 19, 1972

NEED TO PREVENT FIRES

Not counting the damage to the 'Seawise University', fires in Hong Kong in the year 1971-72 cost some \$85 million, an increase of 160 per cent over the previous year, or 250 per cent over the average of the previous five years.

A total of 99 people died and 523 others were injured, many seriously, during these fires. This again is a huge increase over the previous year in which 35 people died and 467 others were injured because of fires.

A spokesman for the Fire Services said that of the total \$85 million lost, 82 per cent was borne by factories and domestic workshops although the number of fires in these places was only some six per cent of the total number attended.

Over and above this direct financial loss was the amount of work disruption, lost employment, lost plant, damaged premises, loss of important export orders and goodwill. This is difficult to account for but represented an even more serious set-back to the economy, to say nothing of the untold grief and misery where people lost their lives.

Whilst industrial supervisors, workers and especially management have their important part to play in fire prevention, the Fire Prevention Bureau of the Fire Services Department helps by inspecting premises and ensuring that the standard of fire safety in places of work is maintained, especially in regard to means of escape and fire fighting equipment.

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He said that during 1971-72, over 150,000 such inspections were made in different types of premises many of which were used for industrial undertakings. A lot of these resulted in court prosecutions.

All building plans must be submitted to the New Projects Section of the Bureau for scrutiny, and construction work can only begin if the fire protection and fire fighting facilities are considered adequate.

Very often, however, fires are indirectly caused or aggravated not so much by the lay-out of the premises but by the improper use of the building, the spokesman added.

Domestic buildings are not suitable for use as factories or workshops, and in industrial buildings, the internal fire resisting partitions should only be altered or removed if prior permission has been given by the Building Authority.

More often than not due to a shortage of usable space or a complete failure to provide storage areas, goods and raw materials are stacked in corridors, staircases, smoke lobbies and exits, in some cases close to electrical equipment.

He said this malpractice leads to the setting up of obvious death traps, but still it continues either because of total ignorance or the complete disregard for the safety of human lives.

"Now is the time for management to take a long hard look at their fire protection and prevention failings and to seek advice from the Fire Prevention Bureau on H-222101. The information is free and who knows tomorrow it may save a life, an export order or even the business," the spokesman concluded.

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EXPANDING ROLE OF THE ROYAL HONG KONG AUXILIARY AIR FORCE

Hong Kong's uniqueness is given added dimension by the Royal Hong Kong Auxiliary Air Force which stands as possibly the world's only unarmed air force.

Operating a fleet of six serving aircraft - a new twin-engined Islander, two light aircraft and three helicopters - the force performs a variety of tasks ranging from emergency operations to goodwill missions.

It operates, among other things, a "flying doctor" and "flying dentist" helicopter service for outlying village communities in the more inaccessible parts of the New Territories.

The force plays a vital role in casualty evacuations and search-and-rescue operations in and around Hong Kong. These include the lifting of seriously ill patients to hospitals from remote islands, and dawn searches for lost or injured hikers and climbers.

Its helicopter service is always available to various government departments.

The police, in particular, engage the helicopters for a variety of tasks including air-lifting of patrols in the New Territories, traffic survey, and surveillance of suspected illegal activities such as narcotic smuggling.

The spearhead of the force is the twin-engined Islander, its latest acquisition.

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The aircraft is used in storm reconnaissance by flying near or into the weaker tropical cyclones threatening Hong Kong to obtain useful information. The first experiment was made with tropical storm "Susan" in July this year.

Together with the British armed forces, it also carries out a post-typhoon reconnaissance service which is designed to pin-point areas in need of help.

Equipped with a sophisticated aerial survey camera, the Islander can undertake aerial photography and surveying of Hong Kong's landscape, thereby enabling up-to-date mapping of the region.

At present, the force consists of about 40 full-time civil servants responsible for the day-to-day running of the force, including the daily flying for government departments, maintenance and administration.

The staff includes three personnel seconded from the R.A.F. They are responsible for maintaining standards of servicing and flying. In addition there are more than 100 volunteers, who represent a wide cross-section of the community.

"The local team of auxiliary officers and members forming the force is vital not only because they offer an economical pool of experienced pilots on call but because they have a unique understanding of both the environment and local conditions," said the Commanding Officer of the force, Wing Commander Simon Ellis.

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