

ADDRESS BY HON. JEAN FRANÇOIS CHAUMIÈRE
MINISTER OF LABOUR, INDUSTRIAL RELATIONS
AND EMPLOYMENT

SAFE USE OF ELECTRICITY

*Exhibition by the
Central Electricity Board*

Date: 29 October 2009

Time: 11 hrs

Venue: Jumbo, Phoenix

Mr P. Assirvaden, Chairman of Central Electricity Board

Mr C. Dabeedin, General Manager of Central Electricity Board

Distinguished guests

Ladies and gentlemen,

I am indeed privileged and honoured to be in your midst this morning on the occasion of the opening ceremony of a three-day exhibition on the theme 'safe use of electricity'.

Let me, at the outset, thank and congratulate the management of the Central Electricity Board for its dedicated commitment to increasing safety awareness amongst its employees and the general public regarding the dangers of electricity. This is shown today by this event which I, as Minister responsible for the issues of safety and health at work, strongly support. The Central Electricity Board is in fact organising this year its second national exhibition on electrical safety. I can remember the first exhibition was organised at the Rajiv Gandhi Science Centre with the collaboration of different stakeholders and the event coincided with the World Day for Safety and Health at Work.

Ladies and Gentlemen, according to recent ILO reports the global economic crisis will have a profound effect on the world of work, with a significant impact on safety and health in workplaces around the globe. Organisations are cutting costs, outsourcing, subcontracting and increasing part-time work, with possible cuts in occupational safety and health budgets. The contraction in resources is likely to lead to more workplace accidents, diseases, fatalities and ill-health. Every 15 seconds a worker dies from a work-related accident or disease and every 15 seconds 160 workers have a work-related accident.

We must all be concerned when it comes to questions of safety and health at work. Life is precious. A good quality of life is priceless. This good quality of life is more than just the mere absence of death. It can only be achieved with good physical and mental health and social well-being. The ILO's Decent Work Agenda is a concrete response to the present challenges. Decent work is defined as the right to productive work in conditions of freedom, equity, security and human dignity. Work can only be decent if it is safe and healthy.

Ladies and Gentlemen, through such initiatives the Central Electricity Board is showing its commitment towards its employees, its customers and the public at large. It should not be forgotten that electricity is one of the commonest form of energy in use nearly everywhere. I must also congratulate the Central Electricity Board for the efforts devoted to training and awareness raising. I am informed the Central Electricity Board has its safety rules since more than 50 years now which has been regularly revised to cope with new technology and legal exigencies. It has already launched its safety policy since 28 April 2009. As a responsible organisation and committed to meeting the legal requirements and social expectations that come with its roles as corporate citizens of the community the Central Electricity Board is empowering the public at large regarding the dangers and safe use of electricity. Innovations in risk management and promotion of workers' health, training and education, I believe, should continue to occupy an important part of Corporate Social Responsibility agendas. The venue chosen, I believe, will attract visitors from all walks of life and you should seize this opportunity to share and transfer maximum information to the users or potential users of your service.

Ladies and Gentlemen, electricity consumption has been ever increasing nationwide, be it for domestic or industrial use. However, although electricity has inherent risks one should not ignore the safety rules while using electricity. Technological progress in the field of electrical safety protection has been tremendous. Nowadays, we have devices that are very sensitive and trip to safety at the slightest fault on the electrical system. One of the recent electrical safety devices being used is the residual current device commonly known as RCD. It automatically disconnects a circuit in case of a problem in the circuit, e.g. a current leaking to earth through a person's body. The newly promulgated Occupational Safety and Health (Electricity at Work) Regulations 2009 lay emphasis on the need to have RCDs installed in electrical installations. They should be tested regularly and a record of the tests carried out should be kept. Every employer should ensure that its electrical appliances, electrical systems are properly installed, used and maintained so as to offer optimum safety to the users.

My Ministry is fully aware of the importance of occupational safety and health. The recent tragic workplace accidents whereby workers have lost their

lives give us materials for reflection. Are our present occupational safety and health system adequate? What should be done to further improve occupational safety and health protection at the workplace? This government, I can assure you, has been driving its efforts towards making work decent. The Occupational Safety and Health Act 2005 is a modern legislation that encompasses changes in technology, work practices and work processes to mention but a few. The recently promulgated Occupational Safety and Health (Electricity at Work) Regulations 2009 further reinforces safety and health in the field of electrical safety. These Regulations include up-to-date safety standards in the field of electricity so as to better protect electrical systems and employees at work from dangers of electricity. They lay much emphasis on the duties and responsibilities of the employer to ensure the safety and health of all employees exposed to dangers arising from electricity – either directly or indirectly. They cover a wide range of activities related to electricity and are of importance to all those engaged in the design, construction, installation, use and maintenance of electrical systems.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we should not forget that safety is everybody's responsibility. The Occupational

Safety and Health Act 2005 clearly stipulates the responsibility of employers and employees as well. The employer has to comply with specific duties which include amongst others: -

- The need for a written safety and health policy, where 50 or more employees are employed; and
- The need for periodic risk assessment.

Risk assessment is an important tool used to identify hazards and evaluate risks. It helps to identify measures that the employer needs to take with a view to eliminating the hazards or reducing the risks. The Occupational Safety and Health Act 2005 imposes several duties and responsibilities on employees as well which amongst others include:

- Taking reasonable care of their safety and health;
- Cooperating with the employers;
- Wearing and using personal protective equipment provided;
- Reporting loss and destruction of personal protective equipment; and
- Using correctly safety devices provided.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the Occupational Safety and Health Inspectorate of my Ministry, besides enforcement of the law, plays an active role in the creation of a safety and health culture through provision of training and information. Training programmes for workers, employers, Safety and Health Officers from different sectors of the economic activity are regularly conducted with a view to bringing the required knowledge, attitude and skills to the participants so that ultimately they become more aware of safety and health practices to be adopted while at work. These ultimately improve general safety and health in enterprises for the benefit of works themselves and also for the benefit of enterprises which gain in productivity.

Ladies and Gentlemen, every enterprise should consider occupational safety and health as an integral part of the business activity. Although we are facing economic problems we should ask when cutting costs, why does safety and health has to come first? Who will continue any production at all if all the works are ill, injured or dead? Beyond the economic issues we have amoral obligation: the human costs are far beyond unacceptable. To end up I would like to say that even in

a changing world we tolerate **no compromise** on the right to safe and healthy work.

With these words, I wish the Central Electricity Board plenty of success in this exhibition.

I thank you for your attention.