

PRESS RELEASE

BISHAN TOA-PAYOH TOWN COUNCIL CONDUCTS MASS FIRE DRILL TO HEIGHTEN FIRE SAFETY AWARENESS AMONG STALL TENANTS AND RESIDENTS AT SHUNFU MART

- Fire wardens will carry out mass evacuation of all stall tenants and patrons in the joint exercise with other government agencies

Singapore, 29th January 2008 – It will not be just the clash of cymbals and gongs that residents, customers and shop tenants at **Shunfu Mart, at Block 320 Shunfu Road**, will be hearing as they look forward to the coming Chinese New Year.

Amidst the festive shopping mood, they will be hearing the ringing of bells of a different sort as the market and food centre embarks on its mass fire drill on **31st January 2008 (Thursday) at 11.30am.**

The drill is a timely reminder to residents, patrons and stall tenants of the need to be vigilant and to heighten awareness on fire hazards especially in the run-up to Chinese New Year and during the 15-day festivities thereafter.

The drill will see a mass evacuation of vendors and patrons from the Shunfu Mart and is organised jointly by the Bishan-Toa Payoh Town Council, the Singapore Civil Defence Force (SCDF), the National Environment Agency and various grassroots organisations.

Said MP for Bishan Toa-Payoh GRC Mr Hri Kumar Nair, who is the Guest of Honour at the drill: “We have to take fire safety seriously and learn from past events, such as the fire in Hougang which tragically claimed two lives and the one which destroyed the wet market in Ang Mo Kio. The festive period is the time when the markets and other shopping areas are filled with shoppers, and displayed and stored goods. In these circumstances, an outbreak of fire can have serious consequences.

“This drill will enable us to work with the vendors to prevent any potential fire hazard, and test evacuation procedures.”

Hence, Bishan-Toa Payoh Town Council, the SCDF and the NEA are working closely with the grassroots groups, including the merchant associations and the Citizens’ Consultative Committee, to deliver the fire safety message to all concerned.

The drill will begin with the activation of the fire alarm and the fire warden and assistant fire wardens will swing into action to guide the residents and stall holders to safety in an orderly manner via a pre-determined escape route. The wardens will check every stall on each floor and secure the lifts to ensure that no one is left behind.

The Shunfu Mart itself houses a market with 52 stalls on the 1st level and a food centre with 32 food stalls on the 2nd level. It is within a stone's throw from Thomson Community Centre. The building, which is more than seven years old, is flanked by HDB flats and a Chinese temple.

All evacuees will be ushered to a designated assembly area, where a roll call will be conducted. At the same time, appointed fire fighting teams will be dispatched to fight the fire. Meantime, all lifts will be sectioned to the 1st floor to prevent anyone from using them. Under the current fire drill, no fixed time has been set for individuals to evacuate.

Said Mr Hri Kumar Nair: "A fire drill sounds easy in theory but we often find that it is not so when we execute it. Without practice, people won't know what to do and what not to do. In a panic, some may even forget where the exits are located. Therefore, with each drill, we hope that our residents and shop tenants will be better prepared for any eventuality."

The drill is part of the SCDF's compulsory guidelines for markets and a food centre before it issues the renewal of fire certificates, which is done annually.

According to the SCDF, a total of 2,273 fire cases were reported between January and June 2007. Of these cases, 1,613 were in residential premises. While this number was reported to have been the lowest in the past decade, many of the cases were labelled as

“preventable fires”, many of which involved rubbish chutes and discarded items found at common areas of residential premises.

In 2007, the authorities strictly enforced the fire safety rules against shops and stall holders who over-display or store their goods and block escape routes, especially during festive seasons. Many stall owners also leave flammable goods unsecured, exposing them to the risk of being ignited.