

STATEMENT BY THE HONOURABLE CLEMENT J. ROHEE, M.P.

MINISTER OF HOME AFFAIRS

TO MARK THE OPENING OF

FIRE PREVENTION WEEK 2013

My fellow Guyanese, one year has passed since the last observance of Fire Prevention week. This year, Fire Prevention Week will be observed from Sunday 6th to Saturday 12th October, where, once again, we recommit our preparedness and reaffirm the importance of fire safety practices. This year's theme is: - BE ALERT, BE COMMITTED, MAKE FIRE SAFETY YOUR PRIORITY.

From the beginning of time, fire has been used for a variety of purposes, which include providing for man's existence and development. It still continues to do so. However, Guyana can ill afford the devastating consequences of uncontrollable fires on our nation's economic and social wellbeing. Fires continue to have devastating effects on our communities and the country as a whole.

During this Fire Prevention Week, the Guyana Fire Service will enhance its efforts in promoting Fire Safety, through expanded public awareness and education activities. This will include fire safety exhibitions, radio and television programmes, visits to schools, as well as developing communities. They will also be increasing their presence in places of public assembly, government ministries, and private institutions countrywide.

To date the Guyana Fire Service has responded to one thousand three hundred and nine (1309) fire calls, where ninety four (94) buildings were destroyed and nineteen (19) others were severely damaged by fire. Three (3) schools were affected by fire for the year – one was completely destroyed and another severely damaged.

Of the total number of fires for the year, forty four (44) were the result of acts of arson, resulting from domestic disputes, property disputes or wanton destruction to property, through acts of criminality and other nefarious acts. Six hundred and twenty nine (629) were the result of rubbish or vegetation fires. Additionally, twelve (12) precious lives were lost – of that amount, four (4) were children. Two hundred and ninety seven (297) persons were left homeless.

The causes of most of these fires stemmed from unsafe practices such as carelessness, leaving children unattended, unsafe use and stealing of electricity and acts of arson. Let us rededicate ourselves to preventing tragedy before it strikes and practice fire safety in our homes and workplaces. Every effort should be made to teach your family about fire safety. All of us can take meaningful steps to reduce the risk of fire in our homes.

The dry season seems to be upon us now and as such, there is a likelihood that there will be an increase in grass/bush fires, which can occur through spontaneous ignition or deliberate setting by a few who shows no regard for the wellbeing of others. We must be reminded that rubbish and bush fires are often unpredictable, which is why it is essential for people to practice proper fire prevention. It must be remembered that these fires can become uncontrollable and spread to buildings. If there is a need for persons to dispose of rubbish and vegetation, it should be done by means other than the use of fire. Citizens must be cognizant of the fact that these fires can affect your neighbours as well as the environment and also damage public properties.

I implore you parents and guardians, do not leave small children unattended and always keep matches and lighters out of their reach. As far as possible, refrain from leaving elderly or sick persons alone in the home.

The Guyana Fire Service has embarked on the reintroduction of the Ambulance Service into the Department. This is necessary especially in instances where the Fire Service is summoned to the scene of a fire, rescues are performed and transportation of victims is required. In many cases the fire appliances are used to carry out this function much to the discomfort of the persons affected and the ranks of the Fire Service, due to the fact that the fire trucks are not designed for that purpose.

The Guyana Fire Service's responses to Road Traffic Accidents have increased to twenty six (26) to date. This Department has been equipping its appliances to deal with extricating and rescuing victims of such emergencies. However, appropriate transportation is essential to complete the rescue process. This vital service forms part of the mission of the Guyana Fire Service, which we are striving to have re-named **THE GUYANA FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE.**

History was created during the past year, when, for the first time five hinterland communities were presented with firefighting equipment to deal with any eventuality. The residents in Kwakwani, Lethem, Port Kaituma, Mahdia and Mabaruma are now trained and equipped to respond to fires in the areas where they live. This is a significant investment by the Government to bring much needed relief to these communities.

As development continues throughout the country and especially in the hinterland, it is certain that other communities will benefit from such initiative.

The Guyana Fire Service has an approved sum of forty two (42) million dollars for the purchase of LAND AND WATER TRANSPORT, thirty five (35) million for TOOLS AND EQUIPMENT. Seventy five (75) million dollars has been approved for buildings. This will see the completion of the training facility at Leonora by the end of this year 2013.

There are plans to build new Fire Station on the West Bank of Demerara, which will bring some amount of relief to members of that community.

In declaring Fire Prevention Week 2013 open, I call on all Guyanese, to actively participate in the week's activities. It is my sincere hope that all citizens would diligently adhere to good Fire Safety Practices and take all precautions to avert a fire situation at your home, your places of work or places that are of interest to you. On that note, I call on proprietors of businesses to ensure that your place of business, workers and patrons are protected from outbreaks of fire.

As we mark the beginning of Fire Prevention Week 2013, let us extend our thoughts and prayers to all those who have been affected by fires this year. I wish to extend sincere gratitude to the members of the various Auxiliary groups who continue to give much needed support in their communities. Together, let us commend the courageous men and women of the Guyana Fire Service, who continue to put their lives at risk in order to save other people's lives and properties from destruction by fire. In so doing, let us focus on the theme; **BE ALERT, BE COMMITTED, MAKE FIRE SAFETY YOUR PRIORITY**, and strive to make this a reality.

Thank you.

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