

SPEECH BY ASSOC. PROF. HO PENG KEE, SENIOR MINISTER OF STATE FOR LAW & HOME AFFAIRS, AT THE OFFICIAL LAUNCH OF "STOP SHOP THEFT" PROGRAMME ON WEDNESDAY, 16 JULY 2003, 2.05PM, AT THE ROCK AUDITORIUM, SUNTEC CITY

Good Afternoon Ladies and Gentlemen,

In Partnership to Stop Shop Thefts

It is my pleasure to be here today at the launch of Dairy Farm Singapore's "Stop Shop Theft" Programme. Shop theft is one of the major headaches that the retail industry faces. This programme is a proactive move and an excellent example of how businesses like Dairy Farm can work with government agencies such as the Singapore Police Force, and community-led bodies like the National Crime Prevention Council as well as the Family and Juvenile Justice Centre of the Subordinate Courts, Singapore, to fight a problem of mutual concern.

Shop Theft & Youth Crimes

At the launch of the Festive Season Crime Prevention Campaign last November, Police replaced the term "shoplifting" with "shop theft" to emphasise the message, especially to youths and parents, that this act is a criminal offence and not a casual act of mischief or bravado.

Why should we place so much emphasis on shop theft? Besides its detrimental impact on retailers' businesses, statistics show that shop theft is a crime increasingly committed by young offenders. This trend is a concern.

Shop theft is the most prevalent offence committed by youths between 7 and 19 years of age. From 1997 to 2002, more youths were arrested for shop theft than any other crime. During this period, between 3 to 5 youths out of every 10 arrested by the Police were arrested for shop theft.

In 2002 alone, there was a 56 per cent increase in the arrest of juveniles (that is those aged between 7 to 15) to about 2,200 persons, with students forming more than two thirds (78 per cent) of those arrested.

Three quarters of these juveniles were arrested for theft and related offences with shop theft accounting for 42 per cent, or nearly half, of those arrests in 2002. There was also a sharp rise in the number of juveniles arrested for shop theft last year – a jump of 35 per cent to 914 persons arrested.

Working Towards Reducing Youth Crimes

Addressing juvenile crime is a matter that involves not only the Police but also the community, parents, educators and all relevant parties. It is not just about committing a crime – it also points to a deterioration of values.

This is why the Inter-Ministry Committee on Youth Crime or IMYC was formed in 1995. The IMYC brings together key stakeholders of youth development such as Ministry of Community Development and Sports, Ministry of Education, Ministry of Home Affairs, the Singapore Police Force, the Subordinate Courts, the Prisons Department, the National Council of Social Services and the National Youth Council, to work in concert to prevent our youths from committing crime.

This collaborative approach by the IMYC has been productive. Over the years, the results have been encouraging. To address the rise in youth crime over this past year, IMYC together with the National Crime Prevention Council, or NCPC, has produced a set of exhibition panels to discourage students from committing crimes. This is the latest initiative of an ongoing education campaign involving the Police, NCPC and your schools.

Through impactful visuals, we hope to educate students that they can choose to turn away from crime. Similarly, the Police and the NCPC will be working with Dairy Farm Group to hold a series of exhibitions at four shopping centres to drive home the message that shop theft is a crime.

Using the same partnership approach, Dairy Farm has also involved teachers and representatives from primary and secondary schools in its "Stop Shop Theft" programme. To all our educators here today, I encourage you to use the information you receive today to help instill the right values in your students and to educate them on the perils of committing crime.

Shop Theft Stops!

Ladies and gentlemen, I urge everyone – including parents, educators, community leaders VWOs, government agencies and our private sector friends – to work together to reduce youth crime, especially shop theft. Let's instill positive values in our youths by rolling up our sleeves, and working with them. With greater interaction and empathy, more can be achieved. Meanwhile, the process of education, enforcement and rehabilitation must continue.

Thank you.