

PREFACE

Pascal said, "Man is only a reed, but he is a thinking reed". (1) When confronted with a task which requires propositional thought, man - social animal that he is - has always functioned best when that task requires him to marshall his intellectual, physical, and social resources into effective patterns of action for the common good.

But sadly the motivation to maintain a concerted attack on the fire problem is shadowed by public ignorance and apathy - ignorance of the true significance of the depth of the fire problem, not only as a threat to personal safety and welfare in a combustible environment but also to the material resources of our nation, and apathy toward using intelligently the knowledge already possessed to mitigate fire losses.

This study seeks to focus attention on some aspects of the fire problem in downtown Port of Spain. Prior to field investigation, buildings in the area were classified according to the type of occupancy, (Appendix II) and also in terms of construction:

- Class A - Total non-combustible construction.
- Class B - Traditional construction, combustible floors and roofs.
- Class C - Combustible construction throughout.

A sample of each classification was surveyed for identification and evaluation of the major hazards that threaten:

1. the safety of occupants and occasional visitors to the buildings.

(ii)

2. the properties themselves or materials to be stored in them;
3. the continuity of business.

Particular attention was paid to ascertain the design and construction of buildings in relation to fire spread, fire detection and extinguishing devices, fire/smoke alarm units, means of escape and housekeeping and it was immediately evident that more stringent regulations were required to remedy many conditions and to make the services of the Fire Authority more effective.

The study is intended to provide information that would allow an understanding of the process of fire development, the behaviour of materials under fire and an identification of the common fire hazards and measures for ensuring fire safety within built-up areas such as downtown Port of Spain.

The study also includes a survey of the economic aspects of fire losses over the past few years. It attempts to draw attention not only to the tremendous annual waste caused by fire, water and smoke damage but also ^{to} the innumerable indirect and intangible losses that cannot be measured in dollars.

More importantly it examines the scope of Competent Authorities e.g. the Town and Country Planning Division, and the Fire Authority. The latter organisation was selected for study so as to provide an insight into the constraints in the present structure of the administration of the Fire Authority. These constraints would undoubtedly affect the efficiency and effectiveness of this agency.

(iii)

The Appendices contain information that is complementary to the material in the main body of the Study. The topics covered in the appendices include - Terminology - Explanation of Terms; The Fire Services Act No.42 of 1975; Proposals for the Reorganisation of the Fire Services.