

Feb. 13, 1974

Editorial

High Rise Worry.....

Recently in Sao Paulo, Brazil, there was a terrible fire that saw almost 200 people killed. In an unhappy aftermath, city officials and firemen hurled accusations at each other, trying to pinpoint the blame for the tragedy, even as relatives mourned the dead.

There have been similar such fires recently throughout the world, including the United States. It emphasizes again the vulnerability of high-rise buildings to fire. The buildings, mostly, are fire-resistant but they aren't fireproof. And, because of their size, they are extremely difficult for firemen to fight. This coupled with the fact that such high-rise buildings are also difficult to evacuate. Panic, smoke inhalation, along with the fire itself cause most of the deaths.

While the Guam fire department has recently increased its capacity for height in fighting the fires we wonder if our codes are stringent enough. High rises are a relatively new development on the island. Until about three years ago, we didn't have a single building over three stories high. Now we have approximately 10 that fit that description.

Fire officials, who have the responsibility of preventing loss of life, are almost unanimous in agreeing that the only effective way to detect, control and extinguish fires in high-rise buildings is with an automatic sprinkler system.

These sprinklers are on duty 24 hours a day, they can be placed to control fires in any area in the building, and they will put out small fires before they become big ones. Both the City of Honolulu and the State of Hawaii are now considering sprinkler legislation. Right now action is being delayed for a study on the possibility of making the ordinance retroactive for existing buildings. We would imagine that this would be difficult to do, and may be legally impossible. Frankly, we're thinking more of the future, because we know that more and more high rise buildings will be constructed here because of our limited land space.

Another bill, passed by the Hawaii House of Representatives, and now being considered by the Senate Health Committee, would not only require sprinklers for high-rises, but would insist on other safety features, involving elevators, such as communications and emergency power. The chief hazard in high-rise buildings is getting the people out once a fire does start. If the power goes off, the elevators don't run and the people become trapped, and panic.

There is, of course, opposition against a sprinkler law from developers, who argue that such devices aren't necessary in view of advances in recent years in safety designs, and fire-proof materials. In fact, Hawaii is considering an alternative ordinance that would give a developer a choice between sprinklers and compartmentation—a plan which would seal off a given area if a fire should occur. Fire officials there recognize the value of the improved standards of compartmentation. However, they insist that no other method is as effective in controlling high-rise fires as sprinklers.

Guam's planners and public safety people should make every effort to study the Hawaii proposals, to see if they can be applied effectively on this island. The safety of the occupants of these buildings should be foremost in our minds. Our building codes must reflect the latest thinking by the experts in the field. JCM.

Trade Fair Due.....

The island people, out of curiosity if nothing else, should make every effort to attend Guam's first International Trade Festival scheduled for March 13-17 at the new International Trade Center in Tamuning.

Such a venture marks a new coming of age for Guam. A few years ago such a project wouldn't have been at all possible, both because of lack of space, and because of lack of articles to exhibit.

International Trade Festival president Lui A. Pilwale, in announcing the festival, said that it would provide a media for the public to become acquainted with new products, technology and development projects.

It won't be all business. Also planned is an exhibit on the history of Guam, song and talent contests, and some name entertainment.

The Trade festival promoters anticipate an attendance of more than 30,000 during the five-day exhibition. The exhibits will be placed in booths, and will feature merchandise from air conditioners and ice makers to wigs and books. The festival should, as its name implies, be truly on an international scale. Today, modern Guam imports not only from the U.S. mainland, as it did only a few years ago, but also from Taiwan, Thailand, Japan, Hong Kong, Australia, New Zealand—and many other countries around the world. Discriminate buyers can pick up imported glass, jade carvings, or beautiful woodwork from The Philippines.

We hope and expect that islanders, especially throughout Micronesia, will be able to participate as well to show handicraft items such as the Palauan story boards, or the Marshall stick charts.

An international trade fair is standard in many places in the world. We're delighted to find that Guam, at last, is going to be included in such a venture. JCM