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**Safe or Save?**by **Engr. Lum Youk Lee**, *MIEM, P. Eng.*

Chairman, Mechanical Engineering Technical Division

WE love cost saving because it translates into 'confirmed' revenue and is a highly praised virtue, so much so that some companies even make KPIs out of it. Safety, on the other hand, is an expense and appears to be simply 'prevention' cost to avoid possible legal suits or lost in productivity. So, it is a battle between 'confirmed saving' and 'cost avoidance'.

There is a need for the industry to pay greater attention to invisible values. Walking into any building, we are attracted to physical objects such as the architectural finishes, interior decoration and lighting or sound systems. In fact, it is not hard for one to appreciate the price tag on these things because we can see and feel them.

However, there are intangible or invisible features which form major parts of the building too, such as the fire protection system. "What?! A few red pumps and ugly sprinkler heads cost more than a Mercedes Benz?" Does this ring a bell?

The situation reminds me of a particular Sunday school teaching I learnt, 'Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but he/she who fears the Lord is to be praised'. How much attention is paid to the safety compliance of a complex compared to its outward beauty?

Safety and ergonomics in built environments are equally important as disasters, due to the deficiencies of the former, can lead to casualties no less than those incurred in accidents during the construction period, like the collapse of the Sampoong Department Store in Korea in 1995 and the 1975 outbreak of Legionnaires' disease in Philadelphia, United States.

We know good indoor air quality translates into a healthier workforce and reduces sick leaves and medical claims, but these will remain 'textbook science' without enforcement and significant incentives. ■

FUTURE THEMES**October 2009***Biomedical Engineering and Biotechnology (Submission by mid Aug 2009)***November 2009***ICT and Smart Building (Submission by early Sept 2009)***December 2009***Dispute Resolutions in Engineering (Submission by early Oct 2009)*