SUMMARY

The subject of property maintenance has taken on an added importance in recent years as the number of new buildings increases. In addition, the existing stock of buildings would also require continuous maintenance in order to prolong their economic life and keep them in an acceptable condition for use.

This dissertation aims to study the problems that are besetting the cleaning industry, a major component of property maintenance. It also aims to look at the various steps taken by the cleaning contractors to minimise the adverse impact of the problems and to make recommendations with the aim of alleviating the problems of the industry for the benefit of all concerned.

The survey showed that almost all cleaning contractors are facing a shortage of workers and their main problems and concerns are mostly labour related. A majority of them are of the opinion that the government should assist the industry by introducing measures to allow them to recruit foreign workers from the non-traditional sources. At the very least, they should be allowed to utilise workers from other approved categories of work that have an excess of workers. It is common knowledge that construction sub-contractors frequently release their foreign workers to cleaning contractors for short periods to minimise their labour costs when they have excess
workers. However, the recent announcement by the government to allocate work permit entitlements of foreign workers to main construction contractors and for them to subsequently allocate the entitlements to their sub-contractors working under their projects, will have an adverse impact on the cleaning industry. This will in effect have the implication of cutting a major source of labour supply for the cleaning contractors.

The local workers cannot be called upon to form the major force of cleaning work. There is an image problem associated with the industry that distract the local workers to the industry. Furthermore, career prospects in the industry are rather limited. The contractors attempt to minimise their problems by increasing the sources of recruitment of labour, improving their working conditions and provide slightly higher salaries.

The dissertation concludes by looking at some of the issues relating to the intake of foreign labour in the cleaning industry. It states that there is very little hope that the government will introduce measures to allow the inflow of foreigners into the industry, as is the case in the construction industry. We should not hope for any immediate change of policy from the government but work within the existing framework and structure. There are major social, economic and political implications which the country has to shoulder. At the very least, the government may only allow foreign workers from the non-traditional sources on a limited basis in certain sectors of the industry. This has already happened for the cleaning of premises in the town councils.
Recommendations are made to the industry to improve its work productivity through mechanisation, and better publicity of the activities and efforts conducted by the Environmental Management Association of Singapore (EMAS). The government should allow contractors the flexibility of using workers from other industries that have excess workers. This will prevent a "hollowing out" effect of the industry, with the final outcome that only the contractors who are able to attract enough workers being able to survive in this tight labour market. The labour costs will increase resulting in higher operating costs for clients.