

REFORMING OUR WSH LANDSCAPE

(2005–2014)







TOP:
Government, union and industry leaders attend the launch of the Tripartite Forum on Job Re-Creation at the National Trades Union Congress Centre.

BOTTOM:
Prime Minister Mr. Lee Hsien Loong addressing the issues and strategies of job re-creation at the Forum.

By the first decade of the new millennium, Workplace Safety and Health (WSH) in Singapore had already taken a huge leap forward. However, industrial accident frequency rates stagnated at around 2.2 industrial accidents per million man-hours worked. To overcome this hurdle and achieve a breakthrough in WSH performance, a change in strategy was needed.

Hence, a new WSH framework was unveiled. The establishment of the Occupational Safety and Health Division (OSHD), followed by the formation of the WSH Council and WSH Institute, further paved the way toward a more connected and vibrant WSH landscape. Supported by the steady growth in industry ownership and awareness of WSH issues, collaborations between various entities became a source of strength amid this time of rapid change.

MAKING PROGRESS THROUGH TRIPARTITE PARTNERSHIP

Trade unions affiliated to the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC) were receptive to the call for closer collaboration amongst stakeholders involved in WSH. This led to the building of the spirit of tripartism. Kindled by the continuous dialogue between unions, employers and the Government, the tripartite collaboration brought together partners such as the Ministry of Manpower (MOM), NTUC and the Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF).

Together, these entities worked to understand the WSH needs of the industry and identify sectoral strengths and gaps to achieve improvements in WSH. Over the years, the tripartite partners addressed a wide range of issues. Among them are the re-creation of jobs, training, upgrading of the workforce, and pushing for fair and progressive employment practices. All of these efforts helped boost Singapore's economic competitiveness and contributed to overall progress in WSH.

MARKING A NEW BEGINNING WITH FRAMEWORK REFORM

The journey toward the new framework reform began in early 2005 with a ministerial study trip to Europe. The purpose of this trip was to understand and get a broader view on the various national-level WSH frameworks in the different countries.

Led by then Minister for Manpower and Second Minister for Defence Dr. Ng Eng Hen, the delegation (comprised of government officials, industry partners and unions), set about studying the various components of these countries' WSH frameworks such as:

1. The role and organisational structure of various government agencies, councils, industry bodies, safety professionals and unions that contribute to ensuring WSH;
2. The self-regulation framework such as the incentives and motivations for the industry to self-regulate; and
3. The structure and processes for the review of safety standards to ensure that they are kept up to date with industrial or technological developments.

Upon their return, members of the delegation convened with their findings, and a new WSH Framework quickly took shape.

Announced by Dr. Ng Eng Hen on 10 March 2005, the new WSH framework became a defining turn in Singapore's WSH journey. While previous WSH legislation was prescriptive and focused on compliance, the new WSH framework advocated for greater industry ownership of WSH outcomes.

The revised framework focuses on three primary principles. First among these is the underlying approach of reducing risks at source by requiring all stakeholders to minimise or eliminate the risks they create.

In line with this principle, the parties who create the risks would be held accountable for managing and reducing those risks. Occupiers, employers, suppliers, manufacturers, designers and persons at work would be held responsible for identifying potential risks and taking appropriate action to mitigate such risks at source.



TOP:
Dr. Ng Eng Hen, pictured above, played an instrumental role in shaping Singapore's new WSH framework.

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The passing of the Bill will be a tangible expression that we have learnt from past mistakes. This Bill of itself is not the solution – but it will put into place an improved legal framework to get all stakeholders to embed WSH into their daily operations. Although there is a lot more to be done, it is a significant first milestone in our journey towards comprehensive protection for our workers and their loved ones. Together we can make Singapore a safer place to work.

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Dr. Ng Eng Hen, former Minister for Manpower, speech during the second reading of the Workplace Safety and Health Bill on 17 January 2006



TOP:
Under the revised WSH framework, employees are encouraged to take a greater sense of ownership in WSH outcomes by looking out for their own safety and that of their co-workers.

The second principle requires the industry to take greater ownership of WSH outcomes. Legislation and enforcement would move from its prescriptive orientation to a performance-based one. Managers and workers would be required to develop work and WSH procedures suited to their particular situations in order to achieve the desired WSH outcomes.

The third principle is to prevent accidents through higher penalties for poor safety management. The new framework seeks to impose greater financial disincentives and penalties on workplaces with unsafe WSH practices and systems, even if accidents had not occurred. As a result, this would help to create an environment where all workplaces would find it more cost-effective to improve their safety management systems.

In support of the framework, the WSH Advisory Committee (WSHAC) and MOM co-drafted a national WSH strategy known as WSH 2015. In addition to creating a safe and healthy workplace for everyone, WSH 2015 aimed to transform Singapore into a country renowned for best WSH practices.

This vision is translated into action through three strategic outcomes: reducing occupational fatalities and injuries rate, making WSH an integral part of business,

and positioning Singapore as a centre of excellence for WSH. Close partnerships between the Government and various WSH stakeholders allowed for these strategies to be implemented more effectively.

WSH 2015 supported Singapore's efforts to realise the national target of halving our workplace fatality rate from 4.9 fatalities per 100,000 employed persons in 2004 to 2.5 by 2015. Many in the industry committed wholeheartedly to this challenge, and the result spoke for itself. In a span of just five years, the ambitious proposition was achieved, with the fatality rate registering 2.2 per 100,000 employed persons in 2010.

This achievement was partly owed to the industry's growing willingness to embrace WSH and closer partnerships between the Government and the industries.

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To achieve better results, we undertook a thorough review of our safety systems, which included a study trip to four European countries to learn [about] occupational safety and health best practices: Sweden, the United Kingdom, France and Germany. In these developed countries, the thinking on occupational safety and health and how to make workplaces safer has advanced dramatically. We spoke not only to regulators, but also to leaders in international construction firms, unionists, academics, and researchers working in private institutions.

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Er. Ho Siong Hin, Commissioner for Workplace Safety and Health and Divisional Director of the Occupational Safety and Health Division

ENGAGING THE INDUSTRY WITH THE WSH COUNCIL

Within the past decade, more industry leaders have stepped up and taken on greater responsibilities of WSH matters. As advocates and champions of safety, these enterprise leaders took the initiatives to embrace WSH holistically and implement it within their organisations.

The involvement of industry in WSH matters was taken to the next level with the forming of WSHAC in 2005. Comprising 14 industry leaders and four industry-specific committees, WSHAC brought WSH and businesses together in a joint effort to raise WSH standards.

The role of WSHAC was two-fold. Bringing industry insights, the Committee advised MOM on issues concerning WSH standards and regulations. Conversely, the Committee also played a part in securing greater industry support and participation in upholding WSH standards.

The partnership between the Government and the industries was further strengthened in April

2008, when the WSHAC was elevated to a full-fledged council, and renamed the Workplace Safety and Health Council. Today, the Council is made up of leaders across all major industries (including construction, manufacturing, marine industries, petrochemicals and logistics), the Government, unions, and professionals from the legal, insurance and academic fields.

The Council works closely with MOM and government agencies, the industry, unions and professional associations to develop strategies to raise the WSH standards in Singapore.

Through the various initiatives, the Council calls for the promulgation of the mindset that WSH should not only focus on the compliance of regulations but instead inculcate a culture where the value of WSH is deeply internalised and reflected in everyday actions.

BOTTOM:
The National Workplace Safety and Health Campaign in 2013 called for increased efforts in elevating WSH standards on a nationwide scale.

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It is becoming better understood that good WSH is good business, not only because adverse incidents are avoided but because quality of implementation improves, delivered outcomes are more in line with plans in many other respects, and staff and management are motivated by this good performance.

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Mr. Lee Tzu Yang, former Chairman, Workplace Safety and Health Council



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In the real world there will always be people who believe in safety and health and those who don't and some who are just willing to pay lip service. Hence I believed in the strategy of using the 'stick and carrot as well as moral suasion'. But the real wisdom lies in knowing when to use what tool!

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Mr. Silas Sng, Director, Customer Experience, Policy & Strategy of the Work Pass Division and Work Pass Integrated System Programme Office; and former Senior Assistant Director, Policy, Information and Corporate Services of the Occupational Safety and Health Division, Ministry of Manpower

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Under the WSH Act 2006 framework, the guiding principles are to reduce risks at the source by requiring all stakeholders to eliminate or minimise the risks they create, instil greater ownership and introduce higher penalties on safety lapses. These principles resonate with the Building & Construction Authority's call for technology adoption to raise productivity at the upstream design stage. Earlier, our main instrument in pushing for adoption of productive technologies was through the buildability framework.

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Dr. John Keung,
Chief Executive Officer,
Building & Construction Authority

CHAMPIONING A PROACTIVE APPROACH TO WSH

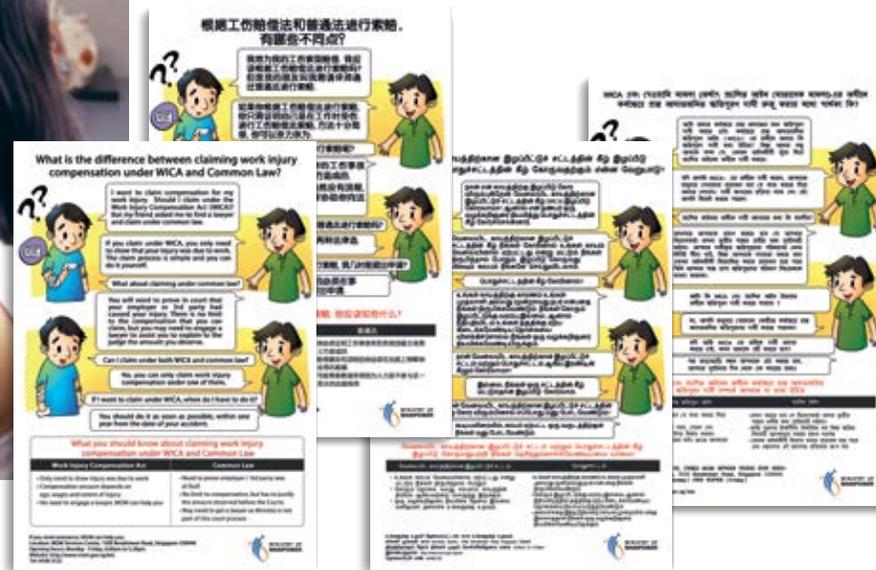
A year after the launch of the new WSH framework in 2005, the WSH Act, which is a key legal instrument to support the new WSH framework, came into effect. The new WSH Act encourages the adoption of the necessary capabilities to identify and mitigate workplace risks before they occur. Thus, protecting the safety and health of every worker becomes a shared responsibility.

The WSH Act also promotes that good WSH should not fall solely on the shoulders of employers or the WSH officers. In support of this, a wider range of stakeholders, that is, from the workers to suppliers to manufacturers of machineries, to name a few, are encouraged to understand their responsibility spelt out under the WSH Act.

The WSH Act was rolled out in a phased approach. In 2008, six additional sectors came under the ambit of the Act. The coverage of the Act was further expanded in 2011 to cover all workplaces.



RIGHT:
The WSH framework encourages a proactive attitude in preventing all injuries and ill-health arising from work.



LEFT: Under the Work Injury Compensation Act, all workers under a contract of service, regardless of their level of earnings, are entitled to receive compensation for work-related injuries.

BOTTOM: To aid foreign workers' comprehension of the Work Injury Compensation Act, flyers were produced in their native languages explaining the details of the Act.

MAKING WORK INJURY COMPENSATION HASSLE-FREE

Another breakthrough in the WSH regulatory landscape came with the introduction of the Work Injury Compensation Act (WICA). Replacing the Workmen's Compensation Act, WICA came into effect in 2008. The enactment of this Act opened a fresh chapter in the continuous effort to refine our injury compensation systems.

In enhancing the WICA framework, MOM conducted extensive consultation with the public, unions as well as businesses. In addition to public feedback, MOM also received feedback from its focus group discussions with NTUC, SNEF, the General Insurance Association of Singapore, the Association of Singapore Marine Industries, the Singapore Contractors Association Limited and the Specialists Trade Alliance of Singapore.

WICA affirms Singapore's commitment to protect every member of its workforce. Under WICA, all

workers under a contract of service, regardless of their level of earnings, are entitled to receive compensation for work-related injuries. This represents a major improvement from the previous Act, where only manual and non-manual workers earning S\$1,600 or less were able to benefit.

On top of that, WICA has also been designed to make the injury compensation process more hassle-free and worker-friendly. With WICA, workers have the alternative to make a claim for compensation up to a capped amount if they do not wish to file a civil suit. This spares the afflicted and their loved ones from the financial and emotional tolls of fighting a protracted legal battle.

Furthermore, most WICA cases now take an average of three to six months to process. The streamlined process ensures that those facing mounting medical bills can receive help as soon as possible. The presence of clearly stated rules and specifications also ensure that employers will not delay paying due compensation to their employees.

“ The ‘no fault regime’ of the existing work injury compensation scheme assures employees who are injured at work that they would continue to receive their medical leave wages and have their medical expenses paid for while they recover from their injuries, and that they would be adequately compensated for any permanent incapacity they might sustain.

” Mrs. Roslyn Ten-Kong, Director, Fair Consideration Department and former Director, Work Injury Compensation Department of the Occupational Safety and Health Division, Ministry of Manpower



LEFT:
A two-way conversation:
A Ministry of Manpower
officer conducts a survey
with foreign workers after
a dormitory road show.

FACILITATING RETURN TO WORK

Besides ensuring that WICA's payouts remain relevant, it is also important to help injured employees recover and get back to work as quickly as possible. This not only aids their recovery process, but also gives them assurance in terms of job and income security.

For employers, they also benefit when employees return to work early. Hence, in January 2016, treatments facilitating early return to work became claimable under WICA's medical expenses. This would cover charges for physiotherapy and occupational and speech therapy, case management, psychotherapy, functional capacity evaluation and worksite assessment for the purposes of rehabilitating an injured employee back to work, and the cost of medicines, artificial limbs and surgical appliances.

MANAGING RISK AT ITS SOURCE

In addition to streamlining the work injury compensation process, efforts were also made to reduce the risks of incurring workplace injuries from the root source.

A cornerstone of the new WSH framework is the concept of risk management (RM). This is an important tool to help in the identification of hazards, assessing of potential risks in the workplace, and implementing measures to control or minimise risks that have been identified. Every workplace should have in place an effective RM system to ensure that employees are working in a safe and healthy environment.

The WSH (Risk Management) Regulations was first introduced in 2006. As part of the Regulations, all employers have to conduct risk assessments and implement control measures to eliminate or reduce risks at the workplace.

In April of the same year, the Risk Management Assistance Fund (RMAF) was also launched as a scheme to help small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) defray the consultancy costs involved in implementing RM. Since its rollout, the fund has helped various companies to implement RM. In the span of three years, more than 1,000 companies have benefited from the scheme, with more than S\$6 million disbursed through RMAF.

Other forms of RM support are also made available. These include having trained and competent RM consultants to carry out RM courses, and to help with the conduct of the risk assessments. The Codes of Practice for RM implementation was also published to provide guidance on implementing RM in the workplace.



TOP:
Deputy Prime Minister and
former Minister for Finance,
Mr. Tharman Shanmugaratnam,
at the launch of the National
Workplace Safety and Health
Campaign in May 2014.

To help companies better assess risks and hazards at work, MOM, together with the WSH Council enhanced the RM framework and rolled out RM 2.0 in 2014.

The RM 2.0 framework focuses on three principles:

- A greater focus on actual practice and to ensure that risks are identified and necessary measures are implemented on the ground.
- Risks should be reduced at source, and upstream control measures should be applied as a first step.

If the risks cannot be reduced at source, other measures must be implemented to ensure the safety and health of the employee.

- Companies should look at how personal risk factors can affect WSH and take a holistic approach by integrating them with traditional WSH risks.

These principles ensure that RM is made an integral part of organisational work processes. Employers and businesses are encouraged to regard safety not only as a priority, but also as a core value.



ER. HO SIONG HIN

“It still translates to 60 deaths last year. And one death is one too many. The question now is: how do you improve further?”

Commissioner for Workplace Safety and Health and Divisional Director of the Occupational Safety and Health Division

PIONEER PROFILE

Paving the Way for the Future of Workplace Safety and Health

Er. Ho Siong Hin's warm and relaxed demeanour is noticeable from the moment he walks into the room. With a warm smile, he speaks passionately about Workplace Safety and Health (WSH), a subject which is close to his heart and his hopes for the future.

Er. Ho begins by recalling the starting point of his career. He had started out as an Inspector at the then Ministry of Labour, visiting workplaces and conducting safety checks for the Factory Inspectorate. He remembers his first day on the job vividly. "I started in 1982, 1 February," he says. A momentary pause follows. "So today, that's about 400 months," he adds humorously, drawing peals of laughter from the room.

Er. Ho's dedication and commitment saw him working his way up the ranks. Never one to shy away from new challenges, he took on various roles in different departments. In 2005, Er. Ho found himself at the forefront of major WSH developments, including the need for a WSH framework reform. "I was asked to revamp the entire WSH framework, and we had to conduct the Ministerial Study Mission to Europe to better understand their Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) framework and see how we could use these information and insights to completely revamp our framework."

His involvement in the reform of the WSH framework was of major importance, as it set the direction of the Occupational Safety and Health Division (OSHD) at the time. Today, Er. Ho helms the Division's work as the Divisional Director and concurrently as Commissioner for WSH.

Throughout his time with the Division, Er. Ho is heartened to see the WSH landscape improving by leaps and bounds. However, he knows there is more to be done. Er. Ho believes that the workplace fatality rate of less than 1.8 per 100,000 employed persons leaves room for improvement.

"Actually 1.8 [workplace fatality rate] is not very good by today's standard," he opines. "It still translates to 60 deaths last year. And one death is one too many. The question now is: how do you improve further?"

The answer, Er. Ho contends, is in adopting a different mindset, and this is something he believes wholeheartedly. "We hope to aim for everyone to have the mindset that every incident and every ill health arising from work can be prevented."

When asked about the upcoming difficulties of the ageing population and what it might mean for WSH, Er. Ho pauses thoughtfully. "Our demographic is changing, and it's changing rapidly," he offers.

"As you know, as one grows older, there is an increased chance of having some health problems and illness. You may suffer from diabetes, hypertension as well as coping with stress and anxiety due to work. All these make it more challenging. As a result of poor health and well-being, a lot of people may drop out from work. So bearing that in mind, how do [we] address that?"

Ever perceptive, Er. Ho has already set his sights on the challenges and concerns that may crop up in the coming years. "That's why Risk Management [or RM] 2.0 was included in this issue – which calls for a more holistic and pragmatic implementation [of RM]," he says, referring to the newly reformed approach of assessing, reducing and monitoring risks at the workplace.

What other measures can further improve WSH in Singapore? Er. Ho points to the Total WSH approach. "Total WSH looks at the overall health, safety and wellbeing of employees and how these [factors] would have a bearing on each other... it's for a lifetime. This sort of triangular relationship between work, safety and health together – looking at it holistically is important. While that is easy to say, it is not necessarily easy to do."

Despite the challenges ahead, Er. Ho is confident that everyone is committed to work together towards better and improved WSH standards in Singapore.

"We want good safety and health for Singaporeans, so on that note, I think that we are ready to take on the new journey."

Aside from helming OSHD, Er. Ho actively contributes his time and expertise at both national and international levels in various organisations and associations. These include being the incumbent President of the Professional Engineers Board, Singapore, the Executive Director of ASEAN-OSHNET Secretariat as well as the Secretary-General of the Association of Labour Inspectors. He is also an Honorary Vice-President of the Institution of Occupational Safety and Health, United Kingdom.

STREAMLINING AND EXPANDING ON WSH CAPABILITIES

To help fulfil the new WSH framework, OSHD was restructured in 2005. In addition to WSHAC, the revamped OSHD structure encompassed six different departments, with each department focusing on different aspects, from inspection and monitoring to policies and legislations.

In 2008, the organisational structure was further streamlined into four key departments:

1. **The OSH Policy, Information and Corporate Services Department**
Sets the direction for national WSH efforts. This is done through policy-making, research and analysis of key trends and organisational capability building
2. **The OSH Inspectorate Department**
Upholds the standards of safety in workplaces through enforcement, investigation as well as knowledge-sharing
3. **The OSH Specialist Department**
Provides specialist support, conducts operational research and investigations, develops targeted programmes and strategies, and forges collaborations on a national and international level
4. **The Work Injury Compensation Department**
In charge of administering two systems: the Work Injury Compensation system and the Incident Reporting system

In its wide-ranging capacities, OSHD realises the reformed WSH framework through legislation, policies and industry engagement. It also supports the tripartism approach with the Government, working hand-in-hand with the unions and employers.

RIGHT:
An ongoing inspection at a construction worksite.

BOTTOM:
Public education efforts: Officers from the Occupational Safety and Health Division briefing journalists before a worksite inspection.



LENDING A HAND TO SINGAPORE'S ECONOMIC BACKBONE

Employers who are ready to take greater ownership of WSH outcomes are not left alone in their quests. Various initiatives have been rolled out by the WSH Council to help businesses upgrade their WSH capabilities. Many of these initiatives are designed with the backbone of the Singapore's economy – SMEs – in mind.

SMEs have all along played a critical role in boosting Singapore's WSH standards. Representing 99 per cent of Singapore's enterprises and employing 70 per cent of the workforce, it is important to ensure that these enterprises have the means to access WSH measures in the workplace.

The bizSAFE programme caters to this need. Companies are guided through five levels of progress, starting from top management demonstrating their commitment towards WSH, to acquiring risk assessment capabilities, and to the implementation of a WSH management system. Participating companies are also recognised for their involvement in the programme. To spur further excellence in WSH among local enterprises, the WSH Council has also introduced annual bizSAFE Awards. These awards recognise businesses that have contributed to achieving excellence in WSH.

Besides focusing on building the risk assessment capabilities of companies, the WSH Council has also developed the CultureSAFE programme. The aim of this programme is to help companies build and sustain a progressive and pervasive WSH culture.

The CultureSAFE programme provides a platform for companies to embark on a WSH culture-building journey, focusing on cultivating the right mindset



RIGHT:
Minister of State for Manpower, Mr. Teo Ser Luck,
speaking at the bizSAFE Convention 2016.

and attitude where everyone in the organisation takes proactive responsibility for WSH outcomes. Funding is also made available to SMEs on a co-funding basis to defray the costs for engaging external resources in the WSH culture building journey.

Another form of assistance offered by the WSH Council is the Safety Compliance Assistance Visits. This onsite engagement service reaches out to SMEs in educating and building up of WSH capabilities in their workplaces.

Besides assisting the management in improving their standards of workplace safety, the WSH Council also turns its attention towards empowering WSH-conscious individuals in workplaces. Under the WSH Advocate programme, companies are guided to identify suitable employees to become safety advocates in the company. These safety advocates would thus be empowered to bring about a better safety culture by engaging their peers to put WSH into practice in everyday activities.

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Based on my experience engaging with SMEs, I found that often, SMEs are reluctant to make changes to their day-to-day operations. Even when they know it is important, the sense of urgency is lacking. They find it overwhelming to change existing methods and put new systems in place. However, once they overcome these barriers, they realise that the rewards from improving work processes are well worth the effort. I believe this applies to WSH as well.”

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Mr. Teo Ser Luck, Minister of State,
Ministry of Manpower

ENHANCING THE WORKFORCE'S WSH CAPABILITY

Beyond assisting businesses in their adoption of WSH, cultivating a WSH-capable workforce ranks high on the WSH agenda.

With inputs from the industry stakeholders, MOM and the Workforce Development Agency (WDA) co-developed a qualifications framework for WSH professionals. The joint WSH Professionals Workforce Skills Qualifications (WSHP WSQ) framework was launched in April 2008. The framework offers WSH professionals a pathway to improve their capability in managing workplace risks through specially designed training courses.

The move received an enthusiastic response, and many were eager to make the best of the training opportunities offered. WSH professionals were not the only segment of the workforce that benefited from capability-building efforts. From guidelines to new standards, the past decade saw many new initiatives introduced to equip workers in different sectors with WSH skills.

The Marine industry is one particular sector where efforts to enhance WSH competency of its workers took place. In June 2009, 13 trade-specific

competency standards were launched under the WSH for Marine Industry Trade-Specific WSQ Framework. By taking advantage of the training opportunities provided, workers in the Marine sector are able to attain WSH knowledge in a more systematic and structured approach.

Since 2007, companies in the Marine industry are also required to send new foreign workers to attend the Shipyard Safety Instruction Course. Likewise, all new workers in the construction industry had to attend the Construction Safety Orientation Course (CSOC). Undergoing and passing a one-day CSOC was made a pre-requisite condition to receiving work permits.

In 2013, CSOC was enhanced to improve the managing of WSH within the construction sector with in-depth knowledge and skills training. The duration of the Enhanced Construction Safety Orientation Course (ECSOC) was extended from one to two days, and practical components were incorporated into the training. To further acclimatise workers to the work involved in a construction worksite, they would be trained at designated Overseas Training Centres in their home countries, prior to training at MOM's Accredited Training Providers in Singapore.

The emphasis on training and raising capabilities is also high in the agenda for the metalworking industry. In addition to undergoing the Metalworking Safety Orientation Course, all foreign workers are required to pass the Worker Safety and Wellbeing Test to continue their employment as of 1 October 2009.

As training becomes an ever more important aspect of WSH in Singapore, the WSH Council has taken steps to ensure the quality of these training courses. Documents such as the Curriculum Development Advisories for MOM-accredited courses, the Competency Standard and Curriculum Training and Assessment Guide, were developed to provide MOM Approved Training Providers (ATPs) with the instructional design needed for a competency-based training course in WSH. These documents contain key information on the courses to help ATPs facilitate the learning process, deliver effective training, and conduct competency-based training and assessment. With capability-building courses and resources in place, more workers would be equipped with adequate knowledge and capabilities to do their work safely and responsibly.

BOTTOM:
The Workforce Development Agency (WDA) is an important stakeholder in the WSH landscape, and was launched in September 2003. Former Minister (Prime Minister's Office) and Secretary-General of the National Trades Union Congress, Mr. Lim Boon Heng, uses a calligraphy brush to spell out the acronym of WDA during its launch at the Singapore Conference Hall.



MR. LEE TZU YANG

“I learnt that to
be persistent and
demanding is
as important as
knowledge.”

*Former Chairman, Workplace
Safety and Health Council*



PIONEER PROFILE

An Unyielding Commitment to Workplace Safety and Health

Experience is the best teacher. This phrase aptly sums up Mr. Lee Tzu Yang's lifelong commitment to Workplace Safety and Health (WSH).

Having worked in the petrochemicals industry for more than three decades, Mr. Lee learnt first-hand the many facets and complexities of managing safety and health. "In Shell, I worked in a range of different environments and roles, which formed my views and approach to health and safety," said Mr. Lee.

His early career included donning a firefighting suit as an auxiliary firefighter at the refinery. Subsequently, his role included being rostered as a duty officer, which demanded constant vigilance. Elaborating on this, Mr. Lee shares that "there was always the need to understand health and safety issues that might emerge at odd hours."

Mr. Lee rose up the ranks and eventually became the Chairman of Shell Companies in Singapore. As Chairman, Mr. Lee was determined to ensure that every employee under his leadership would go home safely to their loved ones at the end of each working day. "Progressing in my career, as a manager I worked to ensure that staff were equipped to deal with WSH risks at the plant; as a senior manager I looked at whether our processes including procurement from third parties supported our approach to managing WSH; and as a leader I worked on building a culture that would drive for the best safety and health performance," he says.

The various roles Mr. Lee had assumed through the years taught him one enduring lesson. To be effective, the call for safety has to be conveyed consistently and relentlessly. "I learnt that to be persistent and demanding is as important as knowledge."

This insight proved especially apt as the importance of WSH had not caught on at a nation-wide level in industries across Singapore. To raise WSH standards and encourage industry ownership of WSH in Singapore, the WSH Advisory Committee was formed in 2005. The committee was then elevated by law to a full-fledged WSH Council in 2008.

As appointed Chairman of both the WSH Advisory Committee and later the WSH Council, Mr. Lee worked tirelessly to foster collaboration

between the Government, industry and other stakeholders on WSH matters. "We faced a wide range of challenges as well as a lack of awareness in the external environment as to WSH," recalls Mr. Lee.

Under Mr. Lee's stewardship, the WSH Council has been an effective platform for stakeholders across sectors to come together and work towards the vision of a safe and healthy workplace for everyone.

Mr. Lee is happy to see the positive impact of these collaborative efforts. "We have moved from relative ignorance of issues and acceptance of status quo to becoming more inquiring and seeking better solutions. The wider community now has also higher expectations of WSH, as in many other fields, and now will not accept the WSH outcomes of the past. This is helpful and supportive to making progress," he says.

Yet this notable progress is no cause for complacency. Mr. Lee has set his sights on future challenges in the WSH landscape.

"As new technologies are deployed in workplaces and the community, we need to understand and manage the risks that new ways of working will introduce. This will require more collaboration between those in business, research and regulation," he advises.

Singapore's maturing workforce is another issue on Mr. Lee's radar. "Our own demographic change will mean more chronic diseases will manifest in the workplace, and we must learn how to keep an older workforce productive and safe without unfair discrimination. [To address this], the WSH movement will need to build new partnerships and collaborations with emerging interest groups," Mr. Lee adds.

Mr. Lee is active in a range of areas. Among these, he sits at the helm of The Esplanade Company Ltd., serves as a Justice of the Peace and is also a member of the Council of Presidential Advisers.

Amid this range of responsibilities, his vision for WSH is unwavering: "We must boldly push to make all our activities safe and healthy for all those involved, all the time."



TOP:
Dr. Amy Khor also chaired the Tripartite Oversight Committee on Workplace Health, which was set up to propagate the Total WSH approach.

ADOPTING A HOLISTIC PERSPECTIVE ON WSH

As Singapore prepares to face emerging and new WSH challenges, a renewed effort was made to address WSH in a more holistic manner.

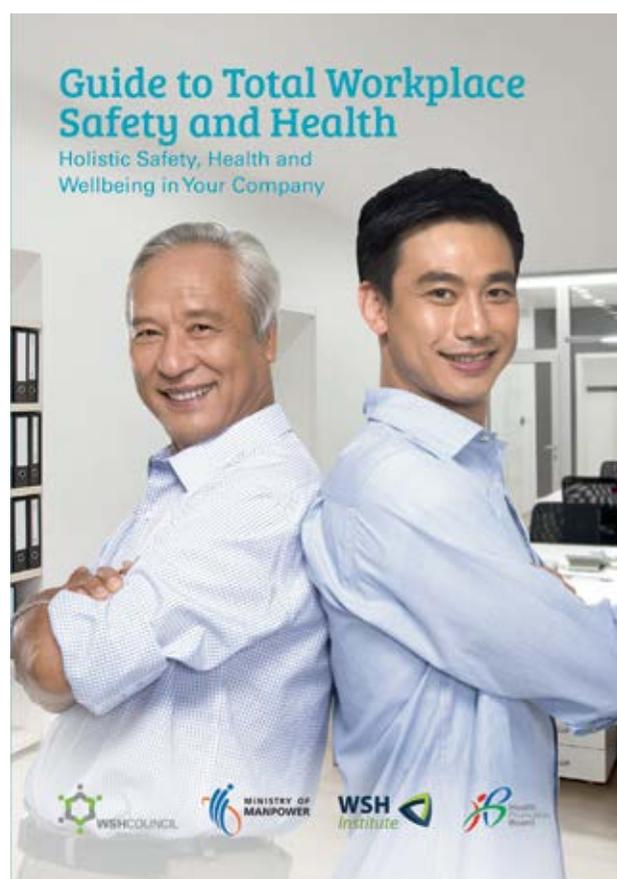
Traditionally, organisations tended to focus more on tackling workplace safety hazards, with workplace health being a secondary priority. Safety and health issues at work were often dealt with separately, instead

of as parts of an interconnected whole. This limited approach is no longer effective as Singapore evolves into a knowledge-based economy and faces a new spectrum of safety and health risks at work. To meet this need, the Total WSH (TWSH) approach was introduced.

Recognising the relationship between how work affects health and vice versa, the TWSH calls for an integrated and comprehensive approach to ensuring the safety, health and well-being of every worker. It encourages health promotion in the workplace to

go hand in hand with other longstanding efforts in improving workplace safety.

In 2012, MOM commissioned a pilot study on TWSH involving 30 companies. Based on the profile of each company, various intervention programmes were held, ranging from office ergonomics to weight management to smoking cessation. The findings of the study revealed that positive benefits could be reaped from comprehensive WSH management measures. Employees of companies where WSH was managed more comprehensively were 7.4 times more likely to be satisfied with their current jobs, 4.4 times more likely to be proud to work for their company, and 1.7 times more likely to report work-life balance.



TOP & RIGHT: Total WSH was propagated to instil a holistic working environment where employees' safety, health and well-being are considered.

To propagate this approach, the Tripartite Oversight Committee on Workplace Health was formed in 2013. Chaired by then Senior Minister of State for Health and Manpower, Dr. Amy Khor, the Committee calls for raising awareness of TWSH, developing the relevant industry capabilities and incentivising its adoption.

Following this, TWSH was officially launched in 2014. It was first mentioned by Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Manpower, Mr. Hawazi Daipi, during the Committee of Supply 2014. Since then, more initiatives have been carried out to promote TWSH and assist employers in adopting the approach. MOM, the WSH Council, the WSH Institute, the Health Promotion Board, as well as other stakeholders worked hand in hand to develop a guideline on TWSH. Training was also provided to equip WSH professionals with basic competency in workplace health promotion.



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A healthy and productive workforce in a safe and caring working environment is a critical factor for any successful and sustainable organisation in today's environment. The ability to attract and retain precious human resource is a critical capability. WSH must evolve to be relevant to our lives today for a better tomorrow. We need to work together to build and sustain a healthy workforce that has the ability to continue working for as long as they want or need to. Workplace safety and health issues must be addressed in a more integrated manner. We need to have conversations with employers, workers and all stakeholders to work together to nurture a culture of health, safety and care in our people and organisations.

”
Dr. Lee Hock Siang, Senior Consultant, Occupational Safety and Health Specialist of the Occupational Safety and Health Division, Ministry of Manpower



TOP:
Working closely with the Ministry of Manpower, the Workplace Safety and Health Council effectively champions WSH standards through engagement, outreach and capability-building.

SETTING THE WAY FORWARD WITH WSH 2018

In just four years, the WSH 2015 proposition set in 2005 had already been realised. This is in no small part owed to the drive and commitment of everyone within the WSH landscape. The pace in which this breakthrough progress was achieved is also a testament of the commitment by all parties involved.

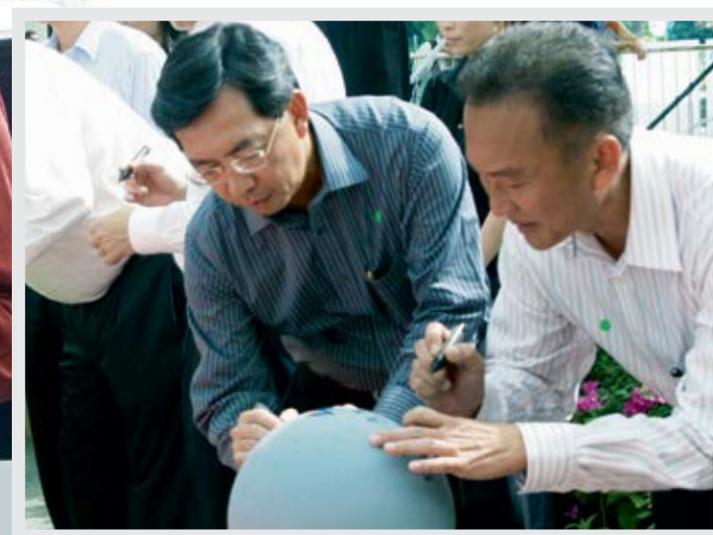
However, a new resolution was already waiting in the wings. In April 2008, heartened by the progress made, Prime Minister Mr. Lee Hsien Loong announced a new national WSH strategy. Stakeholders were further challenged to lower the rate of workplace fatalities to less than 1.8 per 100,000 employed persons by 2018. This new target would allow Singapore to have one of the best safety records in the world, on par with leading countries like Sweden and the United Kingdom.



“If we analyse the incidents which are taking place, we can find many creative and innovative ways to tighten up safety standards and practices, to put right what we are still not doing properly, and to get employers and workers trained and imbued with safety consciousness.”



Prime Minister Mr. Lee Hsien Loong, speech at the launch of the WSH Council on 29 April 2008



LEFT:
Prime Minister Mr. Lee Hsien Loong at the National WSH Campaign and launch of the WSH Council in April 2008.

BOTTOM:
Participants pen their WSH hopes and aspirations at the launch event.

In his speech at the launch of the WSH Council in 2008, the Prime Minister voiced his optimism that Singapore has what it takes to achieve this manifesto. The key is finding new ways to improve the nation's existing WSH standards.

However, an ambitious undertaking is not necessarily easy. To transform Singapore into a leading country in WSH, everyone has to pitch in and be aligned toward the same direction – WSH 2018. Drafted by MOM and the WSH Council and in consultation with the industry, the national strategy took its inspiration from the WSH 2015 framework.

Prior to the announcement of the strategy, the WSH Council invited close to 13,000 stakeholders to provide feedback on the newly drafted WSH 2018. With support from the Singapore Business Federation and NTUC, the WSH Council and MOM also organised a series of consultation sessions. These sessions attracted over 440 registered participants from employer associations, unions, trade associations and relevant professional bodies.

All feedback and comments received were thoroughly considered and deliberated to ensure for a more robust national strategy.

At the heart of WSH 2018 are four strategic outcomes. First, reduction in WSH incident rates remains a steadfast priority. This is followed by the second, yet equally important outcome – making safety and health an integral part of business. Discerning the need for knowledge sharing at an international level, WSH 2018 also seeks to position Singapore as a centre of excellence for WSH.

The fourth outcome sums all these different goals into one overarching imperative – creating a progressive and pervasive WSH culture in Singapore. It is a culture where everyone believes in, lives and breathes WSH. In this paradigm, safety and health will no longer be the responsibility of WSH officers alone. Instead, every member of an organisation, regardless of their rank, duty or age, will be active custodians of safety and health.



Yes, Singapore's WSH performance has significantly improved over the last decade. For sure this can be attributed to MOM's relentless initiatives, together with the continued unwavering support and commitment among the engineers in the Institution of Engineers Singapore, both in public service and private organisations.



Er. Ong Ser Huan, Honorary Member, Institution of Engineers Singapore Council, Member, Ministry of Manpower's Delegation to the United Kingdom on the Design for Safety Study and Past President of the Institution of Engineers Singapore



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In the WSH 2018's National Strategy for WSH in Singapore, four strategies are identified to strengthen WSH improvements and drive the process towards safer and healthier workplaces. One of them is to implement an effective regulatory framework in which the Occupational Safety and Health Inspectorate plays a pivotal role in engineering the gradual shift from the current regulator-driven one to an effective industry self-regulated model.

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Mr. Chan Yew Kwong, Director of the Occupational Safety and Health Inspectorate, Ministry of Manpower

TOP:
Open and routine communication on safety matters is part of a good WSH culture – depicted, a marine industry supervisor speaking to his team.

Mr. Ameerli, former general manager of the Occupational Safety and Health (Training and Promotion) Centre recalls meeting a Managing Director (MD) from a large company in America, to whom he asked, “how many safety officers do you have?” The MD paused, before replying, “I have 6,000 safety officers.” Mr. Ameerli was impressed – the company must have been sizeable to employ such a large number of safety officers. Intrigued, Mr. Ameerli asked, “how large is your workforce?” to which, the MD replied, “6,000.” The story sent a

clear message: every individual contributes to a safer workplace, and co-workers should actively look out for one another, as safety is a team effort.

Gradually, this way of thinking gained traction, and the numbers speak for themselves. Everyone involved took to the challenge of reducing the industry's fatality rates with palpable commitment and gusto. In 2014, the fatality rate of 1.8 per 100,000 employed persons was achieved, four years ahead of the target timeline set.

LOOKING BACK AND LOOKING BEYOND

Singapore's WSH record has come a long way. With greater ownership and engagement as the twin driving forces in advancing WSH, Singapore has been able to set and surpass two ambitious national WSH strategies in the past decade. Within this relatively short time frame, the seeds of a WSH-conscious culture have also been planted on a national, organisational and individual level.

However, this does not mean that Singapore's safety journey has arrived at the finish line. In fact, where improving WSH is concerned, there is no finish line in sight. Whenever one goal has been met, the bar must be set higher. A forward-looking vision will allow the WSH landscape in Singapore to escape the trap of complacency.

As the future dawns, OSHD, in close partnership with the WSH Council and the WSH Institute resolves to continue pushing towards higher standards in WSH as Singapore embarks on the next frontier of WSH excellence.

BOTTOM:
During a site visit to the Singapore Sports Hub, international delegates met up with main and sub-contractors in the construction and facilities management industry to learn about the challenges they faced and how Design of Safety helped in their progress.



Engaging Stakeholders to Raise Industry Capability and Awareness

The industry's participation is crucial to the continual progress of WSH in Singapore. Since the past decade, more companies have shown greater interest and ownership of WSH outcomes. Nonetheless, some lack the knowledge and capability to do so. To assist these companies, the WSH Council has rolled out a range of programmes and initiatives.

First introduced in 2006, the Programme-based Engagement (ProBE) Plus is a flagship programme of MOM and the WSH Council designed to target areas with poor safety and health records. Comprising three key phases, it aims to achieve better WSH outcomes through greater industry ownership, capability-building efforts and increased engagement and enforcement on the priority areas.

Under ProBE Plus, the WSH Council actively engages the industry to raise WSH competencies and awareness so that stakeholders can better manage the WSH risks in their own workplaces. Thereafter, the MOM will enforce to ensure that appropriate measures have been put in place to improve safety standards in these work areas.

The WSH Council has also been putting in greater focus in building the WSH capabilities of the small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Being the backbone of the Singapore economy, it was important to help these SMEs and hence the bizSAFE programme was put in place. Launched in April 2007, bizSAFE provides a systematic approach to help SMEs build up the WSH capabilities in their organisations.

WHAT IS ProBE PLUS?

Introduced in 2006, ProBE Plus is introduced to raise standards in key priority areas where poor health and safety records are identified. Overall, there are three key phases involved:



PHASE 1 INTEL GATHERING

Leveraging on technology and working closely with key partners to identify key ground issues.



PHASE 2 ENGAGEMENT AND COMMUNICATION

Extending engagement efforts to promulgate ProBE initiatives.



PHASE 3 ENFORCEMENT AND MONITORING

Allow review and reinforcement process for ProBE target groups and outcomes.

THE 5 STEPS OF bizSAFE

bizSafe is a WSH programme aimed at helping SMEs, an important pillar of the Singapore economy. Participating enterprises learn how to successfully build up and implement WSH capabilities within their organisations through five comprehensive levels.

5

Deliver Excellence in WSH Management Systems

To attain a bizSAFE star, the enterprise must obtain the required certifications: SS506 or OHSAS18001 or other equivalents accompanied by an RM Implementation Audit Report by an MOM-approved WSH auditor.

4

Acquire Capability in Managing WSH Systematically

A Workplace Safety and Health Management System (WSHMS) Lead must be selected to attend a bizSAFE course on the subject, and to devise a WSH Implementation Plan for the enterprise. Completing the WSHMS plan is requisite to applying for Level 4 status.

3

Implement Risk Management

After gaining the necessary knowledge on RM, he or she has to chart out an RM Implementation Plan. An MOM-approved WSH auditor must then assess the implementation.

2

Acquire Risk Management Capability

The enterprise must then nominate a Risk Management (RM) champion to attend a bizSAFE course on RM.

1

Demonstrate Top Management Commitment

First, the top management must sign up for a bizSAFE workshop for Top Management conducted by bizSAFE service providers.



CultureSAFE assists organisations to instil the culture of WSH in every employee. The culture-building journey begins with a one-time kickoff session with the management team, and is followed by a five-step cyclical process.

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Besides helping SMEs improve their WSH performance, participation in the bizSAFE also makes business sense. According to a study conducted by the WSH Institute in 2013, of the 1,652 bizSAFE Enterprises, 81 per cent agreed that through participation in the bizSAFE programme, they were better at managing WSH. These companies also expressed their preference to engage bizSAFE enterprises for future projects.

Developed and launched in 2012, CultureSAFE also provides a robust platform for organisations hoping to instil the culture of WSH in every employee. The programme assists companies in measuring and benchmarking their WSH culture through a five-step cyclical approach. A CultureSAFE Model, comprising six organisational attributes, was also developed to serve as a common structured framework in addressing various aspects of WSH culture.

With all these initiatives, the WSH Council continues to work hand in hand with the various stakeholders to bring about greater awareness and capabilities in WSH towards building safer and healthier workplaces.

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2009

- Starting 2009, all foreign workers are required to pass the Worker Safety and Wellbeing Test to continue their employment.

2011

- The WSH Institute was formed.

2013

- The WSH Stakeholders' Dialogue on Vision Zero was held.



2010

- A fatality rate of 2.2 per 100,000 employed persons was reached.
- Singapore signed the Seoul Declaration on Safety and Health at Work.

2012

- The Ministry of Manpower ratified the International Labour Organization Promotional Framework for the Occupational Safety and Health Convention, C187.

2014

- The WSH 2018 strategy was realised, with fatality rates registering 1.8 per 100,000 employed persons.
- Risk Management 2.0 was rolled out.
- Total WSH was introduced.