



## **FACTSHEET ON LAUNCH OF OSH 50 YEARS COMMEMORATIVE BOOK**

The Ministry of Manpower's Occupational Safety and Health Division has produced a Commemorative Book, "50 Years, One Vision", commemorating Singapore's journey in workplace safety and health in the last 50 years since Independence. The Book was launched by Mr Sam Tan, Minister of State for Prime Minister's Office and Manpower, in conjunction with the Workplace Safety and Health (WSH) Awards ceremony held on 27 July 2016.

2 The Book, which chronicles the transformation of Singapore's WSH landscape – from the prescriptive legislative approach under the Factories Act, to the performance-based regime under the WSH Act today, features over 40 interviews conducted with eight pioneers and various industry stakeholders during Singapore's early days.

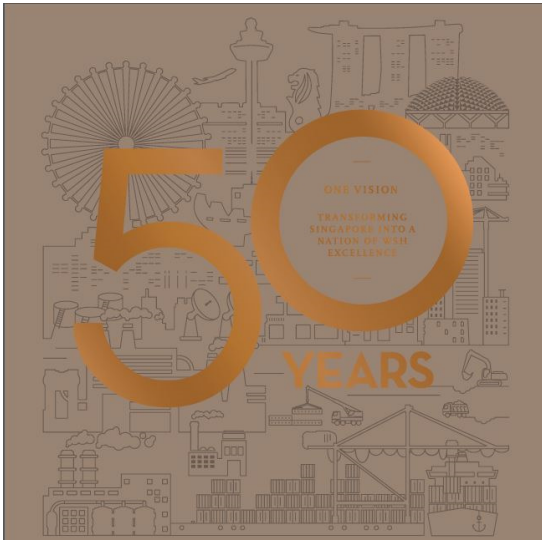
3 Key thought leaders and stalwarts have also shared their experiences in their professions, as well as the challenges they faced in addressing various WSH risks to keep workers safe and healthy. Besides paying tribute to the pioneers who helped to lay a strong WSH foundation in Singapore's workplaces, the book also features case studies of major industrial accidents, marking key turning points in Singapore's WSH journey, and shaping future WSH development.

4 It is hoped that this timeless memento will inspire our current and future generations to continue the efforts of our pioneers to strive for better WSH standards.

5 Research for the book first began in July 2014 by an editorial team comprising members from the Ministry of Manpower (MOM), WSH Council and WSH Institute. The e-book format is available for free download on MOM's website [HERE](#).

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# Screenshots of Commemorative Book



**CASE STUDY**

## A BLAST THAT SHOOK THE NATION

**T**o this day the Sze Hai Tong remains a visceral reminder of the Madam days in Singapore's industrial history, and a primary tale of the dangers of taking safety for granted.

**A SCENE OF ANGUISH**

In the late afternoon of 14 October 1978, a Shipped worker aboard *Creek* oil tanker *Sze Hai Tong* was lighting up a cigarette when a spark struck a fuel tank that had the wind to fan it. The force of the blast blew off large chunks from the tanker, sending metal debris flying in several directions.

A fire for bunker oil immediately sweeping through the engine and boiler rooms and leaking workers who had just returned from their lunch break. Dockside workers who witnessed the horrific scene attempted to rescue their co-workers, but were held back by the fire.

Eight fire engines, aided by firefighting tugboats, rushed to the scene. The fire was put out quickly, however, the hull of *Creek* was filled with oil and water in the

**66** We must not take safety for granted. We must be vigilant and be aware of unsafe practices that could lead to dangerous accidents.

**59** Dr. Cheong Kah Kee, Minister for the Special Constabulary, Ministry of Labour

bunker room. Shipped workers tried to force the victims through smoke. Victims were immediately ferried to the Singapore General Hospital and Alexandra Hospital by ambulances and helicopters. Inevitably, workers perished while fighting the fire.

Over 200 of the workers hit the headlines, the public, equipped with an awareness of government, fought to ensure that the government to ensure that they lived in the workers. Medical staff at the hospitals also were to call for them. Many returned their services and medical attention out of their own volition to tend to the injured.

Two days after the incident, *Sze Hai Tong* pledged to provide compensation to the bereaved families and medical care for the workers, and a special committee was established to collect donations from employees' unions, organisations, including the Ministry of Labour, the Singapore Labour Federation and the Singapore Companies that paid in and on up until 1984. By November 1978, donations reached almost \$4 million in total.

**1978** The oil tanker *Creek* exploded at the Sze Hai Tong shipyard.

**1978** The Sze Hai Tong shipyard in the aftermath of the explosion.

**1978** The Sze Hai Tong shipyard in the aftermath of the explosion.



**DR. CHEW PIN KEE**

"The new generation will face different challenges but they must continue to improve the health of workers."

*Former Chief Medical Advisor of the Industrial Health Unit, Ministry of Labour*

**PIONEER PROFILE**

## The Humble Visionary Who Started It All

**S**o many can do. No man embodies this proverb better than Dr. Chew Pin Kee.

Even as he sits down to recount his role as an industrial health pioneer, the affable Dr. Chew modestly deflects the spotlight away from his own achievements. For Dr. Chew, the work has always been more important than any accolade bestowed.

And his legacy speaks for itself. Without Dr. Chew's tenacious efforts, Singapore's first chapter in industrial health would never have been written. This chapter started in the early 1970s, when the birth and rise of industrialisation in Singapore became the key driver in the growing concern for workers' wellbeing.

These years were certainly not easy for Singapore's working population. This was especially true for blue-collar workers who had to cope with unsafe or unsanitary working conditions. As industry development was well on its way back then, there was almost no system to regulate workplace practices, and it was the workers who suffered the most of this neglect.

The Ministry of Health (MOH) decided then that something needed to be done. However, there was one problem: the field of industrial health was still virtually unknown in Singapore.

As part of the Public Health Division, Dr. Chew was sent to the United Kingdom to study Occupational Medicine. Upon his return, he began to look into the matter of industrial health with MOH. However, it was apparent that the numerous work in hand could not be undertaken by a single person. The idea of creating an Industrial Health Unit (IHU) within MOH was then initiated.

Henceforth, the responsibility of leading this new unit fell on Dr. Chew's shoulders. From the very first day, Dr. Chew was keenly aware of the challenges in some that he was equally optimistic of the possibilities that lay ahead.

The first hurdle, Dr. Chew recounts, was putting together the right team. "The budget was small. There were less than 20 people in the unit, but gradually we started to build up."

His determination paid off. Under the leadership of Dr. Chew, IHU managed to tackle the more pressing issues immediately. Addressing silicosis was one of their first priorities.

He recalls leading the team to conduct X-ray examinations for Singapore's granite quarry workers. "We used a mobile X-ray van to go to the granite quarries because it was very difficult for the workers to come out and go to Tan Tock Seng Hospital," explains Dr. Chew.

The partnership with Tan Tock Seng Hospital was something Dr. Chew welcomed with enthusiasm. "The hospital's chest physicians were very interested in learning more about these diseases. They also got the necessary treatment and facilities for follow-up."

The open-mindedness proved crucial in 1979, when the Unit was transferred to its new home under the Ministry of Labour (MOL). For Dr. Chew, the transition was significant.

Having worked with MOH for a great part of his career, he had to quickly adapt to a new working environment. Being the leader, he needed to ensure that his team was able to adjust to their new home smoothly.

In this time of rapid change, Dr. Chew remained a perceptive thinker, keeping his eyes on the big picture. Rather than dwelling on the challenges, he set the mood to MOL as a golden opportunity, providing the Unit with the capacity to carry out their role more effectively.

Looking back, what would he consider as his greatest achievement? Dr. Chew ponders this question with an earnest smile. "Well, I think the most important thing is I have trained doctors, nurses, inspectors, and the staff. That's what I think is important. Of course, I also laid the infrastructure and laws."

Dr. Chew also knows with pride as he recalled the back that he had written during his time with the Unit - *A Guide to the Assessment of Pneumoconiosis for Workers' Compensation*. "At the time, we had the law set up. However, there was no guide," Dr. Chew says. The development of the guide was of paramount importance to him. "I will always remember what my teachers told me: 'You have to set the standards first.'"

Speaking of the state of WSH in Singapore today, Dr. Chew expresses his delight at the progress that has been made. However, true to his forward-looking mindset, he prefers to set his sights on the future. "The new generation will face different challenges but they must continue to improve the health of workers," he says.

"Train staff to become skilled. Public education is also important to build awareness. Provide the services. Lastly, there is research. You must track the progress to ensure that if there is a gap, you will know why."

More than thirty years after leaving MOH in 1986, Dr. Chew remains active. He now spends his time between helping out at the oldest church family clinic, and studying and preparing for Sunday bible study class at his church. Together with his wife, he also enjoys occasional travels, and reading and caring for their three grandchildren.

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