

OPENING ADDRESS BY MR SAM TAN, MINISTER OF STATE, MINISTRY OF MANPOWER FOR 14TH SISO (SINGAPORE INSTITUTION OF SAFETY OFFICERS) ANNUAL WSHO CONFERENCE ON THURSDAY, 3 NOVEMBER 2016, 9.25AM AT PEONY ROOM, LEVEL 4, MARINA BAY SANDS CONVENTION CENTRE

Mr Niranjan Masurekar, Vice President, Singapore Institution of Safety Officers

Distinguished Speakers and guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Good morning

- 1 The theme of today's Conference, "Developing a culture of prevention", is an important message that goes right to the heart of our efforts to make our workplaces safer and healthier for our workers. Mr Masurekar just now quoted a passage from Charles Dickens, the great novelist born 200 years ago. I would like to quote the great management guru Peter Drucker to be on par with Mr Masurekar. Peter Drucker, born 100 years ago, once said, "Culture eats strategy for breakfast". I might hastily add that "complacency eats human lives for lunch". I hope 100 years later people will quote this, when talking about WSH. Any strategy and plan to improve workplace safety and health that does not involve efforts to bring about a culture change will not bring lasting improvements.

- 2 Hence, I am happy to see over 700 Workplace Safety and Health Officers (WSHOs) here, to network and exchange views

on how we can build a prevention culture. Your presence shows your commitment towards workplace safety and health. I strongly believe that a strong prevention culture must be present in all workplaces, at all levels. This is key for Singapore to realise its vision of zero workplace injuries so that our workers can go home safe and healthy every day.

- 3 Over the last decade, the collective efforts from all stakeholders have helped to reduce Singapore's workplace fatality rate. We managed to bring it down from a high of 4.9 fatality per 100,000 employed persons in 2004 to 1.9 per 100,000 employed persons in 2015. While this is quite a remarkable improvement, we have no time to rest on the laurels as the WSH situation in our workplaces has deteriorated in 2016. Borrowing from what Minister of Manpower Mr Lim Swee Say said, "Run fast just to stand still is not good enough. We must run faster so as to move ahead". So we must double our efforts to strengthen the culture of prevention, to bring down the number of accidents and fatalities. Since the start of 2016, 59 workers have lost their lives¹ in workplace accidents. As mentioned previously by Minister for Manpower, Lim Swee Say, the fatality rate could rise to 2.2 this year if the current trend continues. The construction sector was the main contributor with 21 fatalities or 36% of overall fatalities. Our analysis of the construction workplace fatalities indicated systemic lapses, workers competency and absence of ownership as key drivers of the deteriorating situation in the construction sector.

¹ As of 1 Nov 2016.

- 4 Let me use a recent example to illustrate this point. On 3 September, a worker was struck by a pipe during a lifting operation. The accident happened when a crane was used to lift a metal pipe to be placed into a bored hole. The pipe dislodged from the crane's hook, fell and struck the worker who was cutting some metal casing nearby. If you have subscribed to the WSH Council's WSH Bulletin, you would have read about this case. This accident could have been easily prevented by a few simple steps. Recommendations to prevent a similar accident like this include implementing a proper lifting plan. And checking that the load being lifted is within the safe working load for operating the crane. If adequate risk control measures such as these had been carried out in the first place, the worker would not have lost his life. The same goes for every other accident that has happened. They could have been prevented. Workers' lives could have been saved, if adequate risk assessment was conducted before each operation.

Collaborative efforts are important to strengthen prevention culture

- 5 We need to address the worrying workplace safety and health situation together. The Ministry of Manpower and WSH Council have been working closely with SISO to improve workplace safety and health standards and strengthen the prevention culture. Several SISO members are also serving on the WSH Council industry committees. They have been providing valuable insights on addressing specific safety and health challenges in sectors such as construction, logistics, manufacturing, metal-working, marine and chemical industries.

6 At MOM, we value this partnership with SISO. Since September 2016, we have started on a six-month pilot programme called the Mobile Work-at-Height Clinic. Under this programme, 17 professional members from SISO have been visiting construction worksites to conduct safety clinics to raise awareness of work at heights safety among workers. These members have stepped up to do their part in spreading the safety message in the various industries. I would like to take this opportunity to commend these 17 individuals for volunteering their time to do important work to promote WSH Culture in our workplaces.

7 While SISO and its members are making important contributions to promote WSH culture, they alone will not be able to reach out to all the worksites and workers. SISO is therefore working with the WSH Council to share accident case studies with the industry. Through the Accident Sharing and Preventive Programme, or ASAP in short, case studies and timely safety pointers on addressing various aspects of workplace safety and health are shared online. In turn, employers and WSH officers can make use of the information for their toolbox meetings every morning to educate employees on how to prevent similar injuries. By tapping on SISO's network of members, the industry can learn from one another and we can reach out to more companies and encourage them to adopt good WSH practices. If you have not participated in the programme yet, I encourage you to do so via SISO's website.

WSHOs play an important role in promoting prevention culture

8 These partnerships are crucial and productive precisely because

Safety Officers play a critical role in promoting a culture of prevention in your company. As Safety Officers you ensure that safety and health management systems are in place, work hazards are properly identified and addressed and workers are working safely. Your experience, training and knowledge about workplace safety and health go a long way to protect lives at work and prevent harm to property and environment. And you are the vital link between top management and workers on the ground.

- 9 Hence, it is important that you continue to deepen your knowledge and skills in workplace safety and health. I am happy to note that SISO has developed its WSH Career Progression Pathway, which allows members to chart their career paths and raise their competencies. A WSH Leadership Programme was also introduced under this pathway, to groom WSH professionals for leadership positions and attract talents to the profession. Such initiatives are important to developing a workforce competent in managing workplace safety and health. I urge WSH Officers to take up the programme and upgrade your skills.

And for employers, to support the professional development of WSH Officers.

Conclusion

- 10 Before I end, I would like to congratulate the five winning teams of the Safety Awareness Video Contest organised by the WSH Council's Higher Education and Research Working Group².

² The WSH Council's Higher Education and Research Working Group consists of representatives from 6 universities and 5 polytechnics.

These safety videos for freshmen orientation produced by students from Temasek Polytechnic's Communications and Media Management course cover topics such as fire safety, slips, trips and falls, and laboratory safety. Some of the students came up with their own safety song, while others came up with catchy taglines. Some students even roped in their peers to act in the safety videos. These students' efforts are commendable and will no doubt help spread the WSH message among youths.

- 11 Lastly, I would also like to extend a warm invitation to all of you to the 21st World Congress on Safety and Health at Work to be held in Singapore next year. This is the first time that the Congress is held in Southeast Asia. Earlier on, I was also told by SISO that it has been awarded the leading group in organising the Singapore Accord³ so this event really comes hand in hand to bring WSH to greater heights next year. From 3rd to 6th September 2017, we will bring over 100 WSH thought leaders and practitioners, to share their expertise and experiences on how we can work together towards a global vision of accident prevention. This is a valuable opportunity for all of us to learn the best practices from the WSH professionals around the world to improve our workplace safety, raise our WSH standards, and build a long lasting safety culture in Singapore.

- 12 With that, I wish you a productive and fruitful conference ahead.

³ SISO and the International Network of Safety & Health Practitioner Organisations (INSHPO) are working towards bringing together more than 10 safety professional and related organisations from around the world to sign the Singapore Accord on the Standards of occupational health and safety (OHS) Professionals, or the "Singapore Accord". Scheduled just before the World Congress of Safety & Health at Work 2017, this accord will seal the commitment of significant safety professional organisations worldwide to aspire towards the high standards of OHS Professionals based on the INSHPO OHS Professional Capability Framework - A Global Framework for Practice.

Thank you.

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