

**CLOSING ADDRESS BY MR ZAQY MOHAMAD,
MINISTER OF STATE, MINISTRY OF NATIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND
MINISTRY OF MANPOWER
AT THE SINGAPORE WORKPLACE SAFETY AND HEALTH CONFERENCE
2018
ON THURSDAY 30 AUGUST 2018, SUNTEC SINGAPORE**

Mr John Ng, Chairman, Workplace Safety and Health (WSH) Council,
Members of the MOM International Advisory Panel for Workplace Safety and Health,
Distinguished speakers, moderators and delegates of the Singapore WSH
Conference 2018,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

1. Good evening. It has been a pleasure having all of you as part of this year's Singapore Workplace Safety and Health Conference.

2. For the past two days, we have been privileged to have with us more than 30 local and overseas speakers to share their insights and experiences on transforming the WSH ecosystem. I would like to thank the speakers for taking the time to speak at this conference. They have certainly given us much food for thought.

WSH2028 Strategy: Singapore's plan for the next decade

3. By 2028, we aspire to reduce workplace fatality rate to less than one per 100,000 employed persons on a sustained basis. As the Minister for Manpower said in her speech yesterday, this is an ambitious target. Only four countries – Germany, Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and Sweden – have achieved this with consistency. They have had a much longer history with WSH than Singapore has.

4. Achieving the goal would be challenging, but worthwhile. To put it in context, the target of less than 1 fatality per 100,000 workers is less than half of the average of 2.1 fatalities per 100,000 workers over the last 10 years. The goal is not just to get to below 1, but to do it on a sustained basis.

5. Our objective is not solely focused on this goal either. The International Advisory Panel, or the IAP, reminded us that we should continue to embrace Vision

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Zero. We must believe, with conviction, that all accidents and ill-health due to work can be prevented. This is a vision that all of us here should embrace, to create a safer and healthier workplace for all workers here in Singapore.

6. To realise our aspirations for WSH2028, Mr. John Ng and members of the IAP shared with us earlier the main recommendations for WSH transformation in Singapore. I would like to thank the WSH2028 Committee for proposing these ideas, and the IAP for building on them and offering further suggestions. The recommendations will have to be refined further and more detailed action plans worked out. But let me provide my take on them.

7. To get more companies to be committed to WSH, we need to link WSH outcomes closer with their business performance, and with how MOM balances regulations. Through our WSH efforts, I hope we can create more enlightened and self-motivated businesses to provide safer and healthier conditions to workers. While on the other hand, MOM has to put in place relevant policies and measures – today and for the future – to protect our workers should employers fail in their WSH responsibilities.

8. Yesterday, my colleague Mr Silas Sng shared about new approaches in enforcement to better target poor WSH performers and to expand surveillance reach to more workplaces. However, I hope that we do not have to rely on our regulatory levers. Instead, I would prefer to rely on having more enlightened businesses who see WSH as a positive business outcome. Better yet, as a competitive advantage to win customers and talents over because of their excellent safety and health track record.

9. I am therefore heartened to learn from Mr R K Jaggi's sharing earlier today that Keppel is already using safety and health information for their investment and project evaluation decisions. This showcases Keppel's belief that WSH is good for business. Indeed, WSH can be an important part of a winning business strategy.

10. We know of progressive companies in the Marine sector, for example, that managed to secure business from first-tier customers on account of their good safety

performance. Rather than seeing WSH as a cost, companies should view it as a worthwhile investment. Good safety practices also mean effective and efficient business processes, translating to good business performance.

11. From my experience in the private sector, all things being equal, customers often prefer to have peace of mind and service assurance. Given Singapore's branding of trust and reliability, Singapore companies are well-placed to harness WSH as their competitive advantage.

12. We should not stop with the large companies. When a buyer like Keppel demands good safety standards from their contractors, it will encourage many more companies down the supply chain to proactively improve their WSH practices, without MOM prescribing what should be done.

13. I agree that **the Committee's recommendation to make companies' WSH performance more transparent** will build help service buyers be more discerning in identifying the safer contractors, and align commercial interest with better WSH outcomes.

14. The IAP had also concurred that **responsibilities and accountabilities for WSH ultimately lies with the management of the companies, and has hence supported the recommendation to lay out a WSH Code of Practice for Board of Directors**. As we have heard from Mr Bernard Ong yesterday on how Vopak obtained commitment and buy-in for their Vision Zero journey from the boardroom to the field, I am confident that this development will help to deepen WSH ownership amongst our companies.

15. The IAP also supported **promoting the Total WSH approach** to help companies manage the links between work, safety and health in a holistic and integrated manner. Earlier today, Mr Zee Yoong Kang and Prof Chia Sin Eng explained how companies can manage the adverse effect of ill-health on safety at work and the ability to work, and prevent work from aggravating ill-health. This will allow workers to work more productively, for as many years as they like.

16. However, we need to be mindful of how much we expect companies to manage their workforce health. If we impose very onerous requirements to improve workers' health, companies may decide that it is not worthwhile to employ workers with ill-health. Hence, the Committee's promotional approach to build up the capabilities of companies to implement Total WSH is a sensible one.

17. The IAP also welcomed the **promotion of technology adoption to advance WSH outcomes**. Many speakers have spoken on how technology can be used to prevent accidents and improve health over the past two days.

18. One area which I think technology will also be particularly useful is in making safety training more effective. Training for workers is essential because even if employers are enlightened and have the right mindset, WSH improvements will be limited if their workers do not have the right skillsets.

19. Our experience with the construction industry has shown that less experienced workers are more prone to injury than their peers who have been here longer. Training can help to bridge the experience gap. For example, training can be more engaging and can transcend language barriers by using virtual reality to create an immersive training experience, where workers can navigate WSH challenges and learn to solve problems in a simulated worksite. Technology can also be used to provide more independent test invigilation, so that training providers are spurred on to make sure that their trainees absorb what is being taught.

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The next steps for WSH2028

20. I am heartened that the WSH Tripartite Strategy Committee and members of the International Advisory Panel have, in tandem, developed recommendations and insights to bring about a healthier workforce in safer workplaces.

21. Over the next few months, the Committee will incorporate the IAP's recommendations when refining their proposals, and will continue to develop more ideas by engaging and consulting unions, trade associations and chambers (TACs),

WSH training providers, and the public, before finalising the WSH2028 Strategy by February 2019.

22. This is the end of WSH Conference 2018 but the start of our WSH2028 journey. During the next decade, we will see many shifts in our economy, demography, and technology. We must therefore be cognisant of how our workforce and workplaces will change over this period, and plan accordingly.

23. IAP member Ms Michelle Baxter encapsulated this very well yesterday when she spoke about the 'megatrends' influencing the future of Australia's workplaces. These trends also apply to Singapore, and we must put in place strategies that harness opportunities and address the challenges for workplace safety and health. For example, our ageing population and workforce will mean we have to look at how we manage workers' health to ensure we can sustain workers' well-being and productivity, as we expect the prevalence of chronic diseases to increase.

24. The journey will be challenging, but the outcomes are well worth it. Singapore is renowned across the world for our safe streets and safe food. We should also be renowned for our safe workplaces. This would give Singapore-based companies a competitive advantage in securing business here and overseas, since workers will have a more conducive environment to be productive, and clients will have greater assurance that projects will not be delayed by accidents.

25. We are world-class in many areas, and I am confident that Singapore can be world-class in our WSH standards and outcomes too.

Conclusion

26. Once again, it is my pleasure to thank Mr. John Ng and the WSH2028 Tripartite Strategy Committee, members of the International Advisory Panel, speakers, and participants for making the Conference a fruitful and successful one.

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27. To our international speakers and delegates, thank you for visiting Singapore and have a safe trip home. See you all again at the Conference in two years' time.

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