

**SPEECH BY MR SAM TAN, MINISTER OF STATE, PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE & MINISTRY OF MANPOWER AT ProBE PLUS FORUM 2016 ON THURS, 10 MAR 2016, 2.30PM AT DEVAN NAIR INSTITUTE FOR EMPLOYMENT & EMPLOYABILITY (E2I)**

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Industry Partners

Ladies and Gentlemen

Good afternoon.

1 I am very happy to join you at today's Programme-Based Engagement Plus Forum 2016 to share some matters that are very close to our hearts.

2 This afternoon I want to talk about the importance of workplace safety and how we can make our workplace safe.

This is because workplace accidents can happen at any time, any place and to anyone. It is something that we cannot take for granted and we must be vigilant on a daily basis.

3 Let me start by sharing with you a true story which took place in the early morning hours on 21 August 2015. A 39-year-old manager of a local bakery was worried that the

company could not meet the delivery schedule of the confectionary products. There was an earlier power failure which had disrupted production at the factory. So she went to her company's production factory to check on the products. As she walked towards a table where the pastries were left to cool, she slipped and fell backwards. She hit her head and became unconscious. She never regained consciousness and passed away the following day.

- 4 You may have read about this story as it was reported extensively by the media recently. But there are more of such stories out there that are not reported in the news. Each time I hear of such an incident, I am deeply saddened by it. Many of these fatalities could have been prevented if we just spend a little more attention on workplace safety and health (WSH). Sometimes, little things that we do can help to save lives.

#### Greater need for WSH commitment from all stakeholders

- 5 Last year, there were 66 workplace fatalities – more than the 60 fatalities in 2014. This year, we did not get off on a

good note. For January alone, 9 workers have lost their lives. All these precious lives could have been saved. So we need to double our efforts to prevent workplace accidents because every worker has the right to go home safe and healthy every day. It is also the responsibility of the government and employers to ensure that workers are entitled to this right.

- 6 To find out the causes of these workplace accidents, we analysed the WSH Statistics for 2015<sup>1</sup> and identified three areas of work where we can improve - falls prevention, workplace traffic safety management and crane safety. Hence, for this year's Programme-Based Engagement Plus, or ProBE Plus<sup>2</sup>, we will focus our efforts on these three priority areas. To achieve this goal, the tripartite partners must work together to prevent all injuries and ensure that practices at work place comply with the regulations. On the Government's part, we will provide support with more

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<sup>1</sup> Please refer to the media release on the WSH Statistics Report 2015 for more details.

<sup>2</sup>The Programme-Based Engagement (ProBE) Plus is a programme launched by Ministry of Manpower in 2006 to raise standards and competencies in areas with poor WSH records. The WSH Council supports the programme by raising awareness and engaging the industry through capability building and outreach activities to improve WSH outcomes of the targeted areas.

capability building efforts and customised compliance assistance programmes to help industry to improve its WSH performance. Let me highlight the three initiatives under ProBE Plus this year.

### Priority areas for ProBE Plus 2016

#### (i) Falls Prevention

7 First, falls prevention. Falls continued to be the top contributor of workplace fatalities. In 2015, there were 23 falls-related fatalities, making up 35% of overall workplace fatalities and 64% more than 2014.

8 To create greater awareness on Work at Heights, or WAH, we are working closely with the WSH Council-led National

Work at Heights Taskforce to identify WAH issues and close communication gaps at workplaces. Together, we have

developed a new teaching aid on WAH for supervisors. The pocket-sized WAH Toolkit provides daily WAH safety tips that supervisors can use during their daily toolbox or update meetings in construction worksites. The toolkit can be found in your goody bag and is available on the WSH

Council website.

- 9 MOM and WSH Council have also been organising WAH clinics over the past two years to engage the industry. Industry feedback on the clinics was positive. This year, we will bring these WAH clinics closer to you. A new WAH Safety Mobile Clinic will be rolled out in the second half of 2016. The mobile clinic which will be staffed by WAH experts will reach out directly to workers of small and medium-sized enterprises at their workplaces. The experts will review and identify WAH hazards with the workers, and educate them on control measures to eliminate or mitigate WAH risks at work. We hope such face-to-face discussion in the workplace will raise awareness, and equip workers with the know-hows and tools to prevent falls.

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(ii) Workplace Traffic Safety Management

- 10 Second, workplace traffic safety management. In 2015, 10 workers were hit and killed by moving vehicles within workplaces, up from 6 in 2014. Therefore, making this the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest contributor to workplace fatalities after falling

from heights. Therefore, we need to raise awareness on the risks arising from poor or the lack of an effective traffic management plan. MOM and WSH Council will organise a series of engagement sessions to gather input from the industry on good practices and effective solutions to address traffic management issues. The input will be used to enhance the existing WSH Council's Guidelines on Workplace Traffic Safety Management.

- 11 We will also launch a new on-site compliance assistance programme called 'TrafficSAFE' to help companies assess and implement workplace traffic safety management. A pilot phase will be rolled out in the second half of this year and up to 200 companies will be invited to participate in the pilot.

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### (iii) Crane Safety

- 12 Third, crane safety. The number of dangerous occurrences involving crane operations saw an increase from 12 cases in 2014 to 22 in 2015. If you recall in October last year, a mobile crane toppled at a worksite in Bedok while lifting a

steel beam structure. Thankfully, no one was injured during the incident. But the consequence could have been far worse since the worksite is located in a densely populated area where there are buildings and many residents and commuters around.

13 To mitigate unsafe crane and lifting practices, MOM conducted Operation Heron II from 15 October to 15 December 2015 targeting 55 worksites. The operation uncovered 192 contraventions and we had to issue 115 Composition Fines, 77 Notices of Non-Compliance and 2 Stop-Work Orders. These actions were taken against unsafe crane practices such as failure to maintain cranes in good working condition, no proper lifting plan and not keeping a register of lifting gears, appliances and machines at these worksites.

14 The annual Crane Safety Symposium will be organised in the second half of the year to further raise crane safety awareness. I strongly encourage all stakeholders involved in lifting operations to attend the symposium. The

symposium provides a platform for communication of latest development on lifting equipment and operations, sharing of lessons learnt from past accidents and industry best practices.

#### Improve WSH outcome through increased enforcement

15 To complement the ProBE Plus programme, MOM will increase its enforcement efforts in workplaces to monitor and ensure that proper WSH measures are implemented on the ground. My ministry conducts up to 500 inspections a month which makes 6,000 inspections in a year. I had the privilege to accompany our inspectors to worksites in the last few months to better understand the issues and challenges in our worksites. It was an eye-opening experience for me. While most worksites are generally safe, I was appalled by the conditions of some worksites, where companies showed a blatant disregard for WSH.

16 For instance, I saw some worksites with open sides and floor openings. Common sense would have dictated that the companies put in place barricades at the open sides or



properly covered up the floor openings. A slip, trip or fall would easily mean a needless life lost. Let me emphasise that many of our worksites are good but because of such bad hats, we have to continue with our enforcement efforts to help companies address WSH hazards and put in place necessary measures to prevent accidents from happening.

- 17 MOM had recently completed a 4-week enforcement operation, code named Operation Cormorant II across 500 worksites, in response to the spate of accidents in January 2016. Close to 700 WSH contraventions were uncovered and 7 workplaces were issued with Stop Work Orders. The top three contraventions uncovered were openings and open sides that were left unguarded, no safe means of access or egress to places of work, and unsafe scaffolding.

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### Conclusion

- 18 Allow me to conclude by reiterating that WSH is everyone's responsibility. The initiatives that I have shared today can only work with the commitment and involvement from each one of you here. When these initiatives are complemented

by your belief and actions, we will be able to ensure safer and healthier workplaces in Singapore, and eventually achieve Vision Zero. We must create a safe environment where workers leave for work happily in the morning and come home safely in the evening. We owe that to our workers and ourselves, and I hope I can count on your support for every worker to work in a safe environment. I wish everyone a fruitful and successful forum. Together, we can prevent all injuries and be healthy at work. Thank you.

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