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**Speech by Mr Sam Tan, Minister of State for Manpower at
Construction Safety, Health and Security Seminar @ e2i
(Employment and Employability Institute) on Wednesday, 22
June 2016 at 2.10pm**

Mr Kenneth Loo, President of the Singapore Contractors Association
Limited (or SCAL),

Mr Lee Kay Chai, Chairman of SCAL's Workplace Safety and Health
Committee and Campaign Organising Committee,

Distinguished speakers and guests,

Industry partners, ladies and gentlemen,

Good afternoon. I am happy to join you today at SCAL's
Construction Safety, Health and Security Seminar. This is a timely
effort to bring the construction sector community together to improve
workplace safety and health (or WSH) outcomes in the sector.

WSH Performance in the Construction Sector

2 The WSH performance of the construction sector has deteriorated in the first half of 2016. Since the start of 2016, 17¹ workers have lost their lives in workplace accidents in the construction sector, almost twice as many compared to the same period last year. In 2015, the construction sector was also the biggest contributor of workplace fatalities, with 27 cases or 41% of all workplace fatalities. All of us are concerned with the loss of lives at worksites. I cannot emphasise enough that every death is one too many. Every worker is someone's parent, child and co-worker, and their death brings much grief and pain for their loved ones. This situation cannot continue. Concerted and urgent action must be taken to improve workplace safety in the construction sector.

Strengthening Enforcement Measures

3 The government has a duty to ensure the safety and health of our workers. On MOM's part, we have stepped up inspections and enforcement actions. During a recent enforcement operation in May², codenamed "Operation Harrier", MOM inspected more than 800

¹ From 1 Jan 2016 to 19 Jun 2016, the construction sector saw 17 workplace fatalities, as compared to 9 in the same period in 2015.

² MOM conducted an enforcement operation, "Operation Harrier" from 1 April to 15 May 2016. The operation targeted workplaces from the construction and marine sectors and focused on safety provisions at workplaces, covering work-at-height, lifting operations, onsite traffic management, formwork at construction worksites, and confined spaces.

workplaces from the construction and marine sectors. We found more than 1,000 WSH contraventions involving unsafe practices and lapses. Our inspectors found openings that were unguarded, scaffold work platforms without toe boards or guardrails and no safe means of access between different working levels. More than 22 Stop Work Orders and 300 fines were issued to 117 companies.

4 These problem areas could be easily rectified if companies pay sufficient attention. Guardrails and barricades can be installed. Safe and proper stairway with walkway access can be provided. But because they did not do so, the companies had exposed their workers to unnecessary risks.

5 In view of the deteriorating situation, we have previously announced stiffer penalties. These include increasing the minimum Stop Work Order period from two to three weeks, strengthening the Business Under Surveillance programme, and temporarily suspending access to new foreign workers. Since the announcement, 19 companies have been issued with lengthened Stop Work Order as a result of fatalities in their workplaces. Companies must know that

WSH violations will result in serious consequences, and should take steps to ensure that their workplaces are safe and healthy.

Stepping up safety awareness

6 MOM and the WSH Council will also step up outreach, advertising and publicity efforts to raise safety awareness among our workers. Posters of pictograms showing simple and practical steps that workers can take to prevent injuries will be distributed to all construction worksites and foreign worker dormitories. We have produced decals showing the Do's and Don'ts in common work situations with high incidences of injuries. While workers play a key role in preventing injuries by being careful and taking necessary precautions, employers too, have a duty to protect workers and promote safe and healthy workplaces. Hence, you can prominently display these posters and decals at worksites to serve as a constant visual reminder to workers to be safety-conscious. The materials will be available on the WSHC website for download and reproduction. I encourage you to make use of these collaterals in your safety awareness efforts.

Learning from UK and Germany

7 These immediate measures need to be complemented with longer term structural changes to improve WSH standards in Singapore. Last month, I led an industry delegation comprising representatives from construction industry associations such as SCAL, Specialists Trade Alliance of Singapore, Association of Consulting Engineers Singapore and Landscape Industry Association Singapore to Germany and the UK. We visited key institutions and organisations to learn about their WSH practices. Both countries have developed a strong preventive culture enabled by regulations that focus on upstream controls, supported by a well-trained workforce. The UK, for example, has implemented their Construction Design and Management Regulations since 1994, supported by industry-developed compliance guides. This had changed the way their construction industry worked and reduced their accident and fatality rate significantly. Germany, on the other hand, instilled a strong culture of prevention and implemented a rigorous training framework for their workers, resulting in a highly skilled and competent workforce.

Helping industry understand duties under Design for Safety

8 We can draw from their experiences to strengthen industry ownership and improve WSH standards in the construction Industry.

The WSH (Design for Safety) Regulations will take effect from 1st August 2016. Design for Safety (or DfS for short) is about identifying and managing risks right from the design and planning stage of a building project, through to the construction and maintenance phases. The Regulations place duties on all stakeholders – developers, DfS professionals, designers, contractors and owners – to eliminate and reduce risks at the workplace. DfS will be complemented by BCA's push for a higher degree of prefabrication in the construction sector. With more construction work done off site in a controlled factory environment that is highly automated, it will reduce the need for work at height activities and significantly improve site safety.

9 To help industry better understand their duties under the DfS Regulations, the WSH Council has produced informational resources such as a video, which will be screened later, and an infographic. These are available for download from the WSH Council website. The revised DfS Guidelines will also be launched this year to guide industry on implementing DfS. I urge you to make full use of these resources.

Raising WSH standards and productivity through skilled workforce

10 Improving WSH training of workers is another area that we can do better. I am happy to note that SCAL had raised the importance of recognising Environment, Health and Safety (EHS) trained work permit holders as Higher Skilled R1 workers. These workers will ensure that the appropriate safety and health measures are taken at work, in order to keep work conditions safe for all.

11 We support this effort. Hence, BCA will be extending its Multi-skilling scheme³ to more experienced workers specialised in safety-related works on site. From October 2016, Basic Skilled R2 workers with at least 6 years of construction experience in Singapore and a Skills Evaluation Certificate (Knowledge)⁴ or SEC(K) in the construction trade can be certified as Higher Skilled R1 workers, if

³ The Multi-skilling scheme provides an alternative pathway for the industry to upgrade their experienced workers from basic skilled R2 workers to higher skilled R1 workers. It complements the CoreTrade scheme, which caters to workers specialised in key construction trades. The Multi-skilling scheme aims to build up a pool of workers who are competent in multiple construction trades to carry out more than one type of work tasks on-site. Employers will also have greater flexibility in deploying multi-skilled workers, hence reducing the downtime and improving their productivity.

⁴ The Skills Evaluation Certificate (SEC) and Skills Evaluation Certificate (Knowledge) (SEC (K)) schemes are initiatives by the Building and Construction Authority (BCA) to raise skills, productivity and safety in the construction sector. Workers with these certificates are classified as basic skilled workers. As part of the efforts in raising the skills level among the workers to become knowledge-based, the Skills Evaluation Certificate (SEC) has incorporated the written test component in addition to the practical skill test. The certificate was re-named as Skills Evaluation Certificate (K) in 2000.

they also complete at least 120 hours of training in approved safety-related courses, or obtain the WSQ Advanced Certificate in WSH.

12 By recognising EHS workers as R1 workers, more companies can retain their skilled and experienced EHS workers as they enjoy a longer employment period of up to 22 years and lower levies. Employers will also have greater flexibility in deploying these multi-skilled workers on-site, reducing downtime and improving productivity. The sector's WSH standards and quality of the construction workforce in Singapore will naturally improve.

Conclusion

13 Our efforts to help the construction sector improve WSH standards and productivity will have limited effect without the conscious and collective efforts of everyone in the industry. SCAL has done well to rally industry players and their members, be it conducting nationwide safety time-outs, developing training materials for workers and promoting WSH to its contractors. I urge SCAL to remain steadfast in its commitment, and work together with the Government and all stakeholders to help raise WSH standards in the sector.

14 With that, I wish SCAL success in your campaign and the rest,
an enriching day ahead. Thank you.

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