

<To be embargoed till after delivery>
<Please check against delivery>

**Speech by Mr Sam Tan, Minister of State for
Prime Minister's Office and Manpower at WSH Awards 2016
on Wednesday 27 July 2016, 6pm,
Marina Bay Sands Convention Centre**

Mr Heng Chiang Gnee, Chairman, Workplace Safety and Health

Council,

Members of the WSH Council and Committees,

WSH Awards 2016 recipients,

Industry partners,

Ladies and gentlemen,

Good evening. I am delighted to join you all to recognise and celebrate the contributions of individuals and companies towards workplace safety and health excellence. The WSH Award is the highest accolade given to those that lead the way in preventing accidents and ensuring that workers and workplaces are kept safe and healthy.

2 What do tonight's Award recipients have in common? One, there is strong leadership commitment and support for workplace safety and health. Take Infineum Singapore, a recipient of the WSH Performance (Excellence) Award for more than five years and an ASEAN-OSHNET Excellence Award¹ 2016 winner. The company's philosophy is summed up in the phrase: "Nobody Gets Hurt". Through its Behaviour-based Safety Observation Programme, employees are encouraged to observe one another and intervene if they spot risky work behaviour. The top management is committed to keep channels of communication open. This has encouraged employees to provide honest feedback, discuss safety observations with one another and make suggestions for improvement. Rockwell Automation, another WSH Performance (Excellence) Award recipient, rewards and recognises employees who spot and report any potential work hazards to their supervisor. Companies like Infineum and Rockwell Automation foster a "safety-first culture", that empowers every individual to take responsibility to create a safe workplace.

¹ The ASEAN-OSHNET (Occupational Safety and Health Network) Award aims to recognise companies based in ASEAN who have excellent OSH management systems and performance.

3 Two, these companies are innovative in providing their workers with a safer and healthier work environment. CYC International is a good example. As a company that provides engineering and maintenance work, their workers need to enter confined spaces to perform tank cleaning duties. The restricted space not only limits workers' movement during cleaning, it also exposes workers to risks such as heat stress, and slips, trips and falls. Workers may also face potential health risks from prolonged exposure to oil and hazardous petrochemicals. CYC's innovation was to create a robot to clean tanks in confined spaces! Not only were the safety and health hazards eliminated, productivity increased by over 70%. Instead of 8 workers taking 11 days to clean a typical tank, CYC now uses 4 workers and the robot to finish the work in 6 days. Apart from the safety benefits, this method of cleaning saves the company nearly \$13,000 per tank cleaned.

4 This evening, we also salute individuals who in their own unique ways help make workplaces safer. Ms May Ong is a good example. Formerly in marketing and administration, she made a career switch to the safety industry as an Environment, Safety and

Health Specialist at AFPD Pte Ltd 11 years ago. From setting up a dedicated ESH Web page to arranging and conducting WSH incident sharing workshops, Ms Ong ensures that workers are equipped with sufficient information on how they must and can protect themselves at work. To Ms Ong, WSH is about genuinely caring for others and doing something meaningful to save lives. We are delighted to recognise her efforts with the WSH Officer Award.

5 These are just a few of the many remarkable efforts that all of you here tonight have implemented in your workplaces to keep our workers safe. To all 164 Award recipients, thank you for your hard work and persistent efforts in helping more than 94,000 of our workers go home safely every day last year.

National Archives of Singapore

Importance of learning and sharing

6 Each Award provides useful lessons that deserve to be more widely shared so that we can collectively improve workplace safety and health practices in Singapore. The WSH Council will be hosting more learning platforms where Award recipients can share

their knowledge and experiences so that others can in turn improve their own safety and health practices and systems.

OSH 50 Years Commemorative Book

7 Lessons from the past also offer valuable pointers to improve our safety and health standards. For this reason, the Ministry of Manpower has produced a Commemorative Book, “50 Years, One Vision”, that records our journey over the last 50 years. It captures our pioneers’ relentless dedication in pushing for better WSH standards to keep all workers safe.

8 One such pioneer is Dr Chew Pin Kee. Dr Chew was Director of the then Industrial Health Department in 1976. He was a key proponent behind the prevention and control of silicosis. This was then the leading occupational disease, affecting the health of many granite quarry workers. He undertook studies, conducted campaigns and implemented dust control measures. Workers were also brought under surveillance for the early detection of silicosis. Thanks to his early work, silicosis is no longer a key WSH risk in our workplaces today.

9 I hope this publication will inspire you to build on the foundation of these pioneers to improve safety and health standards in our workplaces.

Multi-pronged effort to improve WSH outcomes

10 We certainly need to do more today to improve workplace safety and health. We have come a long way from 2004 when our workplace fatal injury rate was 4.9 per 100,000 employed persons. Thanks to the collective efforts of many stakeholders, we brought it down to 1.9 in 2015. But poor safety and health practices are creeping back. Since the start of 2016², 44 workers have lost their lives at work, compared to 32 in the same period last year. We have had to introduce stiffer penalties and stepped up our enforcement and outreach efforts. But in the long-term, sustained improvements in workplace safety and health can only come about if everyone plays their part, and we create and uphold a strong safety culture.

² From 1 Jan 2016 to 14 Jul 2016, there have been 44 workplace fatalities.

Improving WSH training standards through Train-the-Trainer

Programme

11 We will also do more to improve WSH training standards. A good WSH trainer must not only be able to effectively communicate safety and health standards and principles, but influence positive behaviour in organisations as well.

12 To help trainers stay current in their knowledge and skills, WSH Council has developed a new Train-the-Trainer Programme. Trainers are now required to take part in at least 10 hours of training and professional development activities each year. This includes attending a course on upholding the right values and ethical conduct required of trainers. We are encouraged that SISO, the Institute for Adult Learning and SIM University have all stepped forward to provide enough training courses to help trainers meet their annual training requirement. Trainers can visit the WSH Council's website for more details on the programme and the list of courses available for the coming year.

Conclusion

13 Workplace safety and health is an ongoing effort and a shared responsibility. We cannot achieve safer and healthier workplaces without the commitment of all stakeholders. All of us must be open to learn new skills, share best practices, make continuous improvements at the workplace and adopt a safety-first mindset. The WSH Awards 2016 recipients are testament to what can be achieved through commitment, initiative and perseverance. As we celebrate their achievements, I hope all of us are inspired to do our very best to prevent accidents, so that every worker in Singapore can go home to their families, safe and healthy.

Thank you.

National Archives of Singapore