
**REPORT OF
THE 3RD MEETING OF THE
INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY PANEL
FOR WORKPLACE SAFETY AND HEALTH
17 NOVEMBER – 18 NOVEMBER 2011**

INTRODUCTION

- 1 In 2006, the Minister for Manpower appointed a panel of international experts to sit on an International Advisory Panel (IAP) for Workplace Safety and Health (WSH), as part of initiatives to improve WSH standards and outcomes in Singapore. The terms of reference of the IAP are to:
 - a. Advise on significant trends and developments in industrial practices that would impact on WSH in Singapore;
 - b. Share approaches to WSH challenges in other countries that might guide Singapore's WSH developments; and
 - c. Critique WSH standards, practices and the regulatory regime in Singapore and provide advice on possible improvements to bring WSH standards in Singapore to the level of leading edge country leaders.
- 2 Two IAP meetings (2006, 2008) and a progress review (2010) have been held and they have contributed significantly to the advancement of WSH standards and outcomes in Singapore. Recommendations from the IAP played a significant role in the formulation of the national strategy for WSH (WSH2018) in 2008 and the establishment of the WSH Institute (WSHI) in 2011.

THIRD IAP MEETING

- 3 The third meeting of the IAP was convened from 17 November to 18 November 2011 at the Goodwood Park Hotel, Singapore. The meeting was attended by all seven IAP members (see list of IAP members at Annex). At the meeting, the IAP deliberated on the state of WSH developments in Singapore and its progress since the IAP last met. The IAP also discussed the following two strategy papers, which were jointly developed by MOM, WSH Council (WSHC) and WSHI.
 - i. **“Building progressive and pervasive WSH culture in Singapore”**. The paper outlines our strategies for building a progressive and pervasive WSH culture in Singapore including: (i) Creating a conducive environment for WSH culture to thrive; (ii) Building capabilities for WSH to evolve; and (iii) Sustaining the momentum for WSH culture building
 - ii. **“Creating and Enhancing WSH Knowledge in Singapore”**. The paper articulates the strategic outcomes of the WSH Institute and outlines its key strategies in the areas of (i) informing policies and strategies; (ii) creating WSH solutions for businesses; and (iii) transforming and nurturing capabilities of leaders and professionals

The IAP also visited a key construction project (Gardens by The Bay) in Singapore to understand how key safety initiatives such as Design for Safety, Behavioural Based Safety and Safety in Innovation, contributed to its good safety outcomes.

- 4 The IAP commended Singapore for the great strides made in improving WSH standards since the reform of the WSH framework in 2005. The IAP noted that in the short span of 6 years, Singapore has put in place comprehensive infrastructures and measures to raise WSH standards

and awareness and had successfully brought down fatality rates to a new low of 2.2 fatalities per 100,000 workers in 2010.

5 While Singapore has done well, the IAP cautioned that it may be difficult for Singapore to continue to progress at the same pace. As WSH standards in Singapore has reached a level comparable to many developed nations, it will be typical to see a slowdown in the progress, as further gains become more challenging to achieve. The IAP encouraged Singapore to press ahead with its WSH strategies with vigour given the increased challenges.

6 The IAP concluded that the establishment of the WSH Institute will complete the foundations of Singapore's WSH framework. The next step is to build a strong occupational safety and health culture amongst all stakeholders, including stakeholders in the more vulnerable sectors, so that they can help propel Singapore into the next stage of WSH reform and sustained progress. Singapore must also continue to maintain its robust enforcement framework, along with education, training and other services, as this will continue to play a key role in Singapore's overall WSH strategy. It is within this context that the IAP made the following recommendations:

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Increase focus on Occupational Health issues

7 The concept of healthy working life can impact life expectancy and public health. As Singapore's population ages and life expectancy increases, it becomes increasingly important to protect the health of workers even while they are young, so that they can work without impairment throughout their lives. In this regard, it is critical that Singapore increases its focus to continually improve occupational health standards and develop occupational health services through the collaboration of the Ministry of Manpower and the Ministry of Health.

8 The IAP advised that Singapore should continue to explore better ways to gather evidence including occupational health indicators and performance statistics. These will serve as a foundation for early intervention measures to improve occupational health standards. These measures should focus on preventive and precautionary solutions as occupational diseases often have long latency periods and it will be too late to react after an occupational disease becomes evident. Singapore should also focus on building up occupational health professionals to support the identification and mitigation of occupational health risks and prevention of occupational diseases and work related disorders. These initiatives will lead to a reduction in sickness away from work and improve worker well-being, workability and productivity.

Recommendation 2: Encourage businesses to fully buy-into "vision zero"

9 The IAP commended the WSH Council's efforts to encourage businesses to pledge for zero accidents. However, the panel expressed concern that pledging alone may not be sufficient to bring down accident and fatality rates. Business leaders must demonstrate through visible behavioural change, their commitment to the prevention of all incidents that result in impairment. They must buy-into and share the vision of zero accidents and zero harm, and work towards this vision with concrete action plans.

Creating and Enhancing WSH Knowledge in Singapore

Recommendation 3: Establish a risk observatory for Asia

10 Evidence-based information is crucial for both policy making and establishing good practices. Based on recent achievements, the IAP recommended that Singapore works towards becoming the leading centre in Asia in terms of identifying existing, and newly emerging risks in occupational safety and health and addressing their root causes. To achieve this aim, the Institute could establish a risk observatory to proactively identify emerging areas of concern and to improve the timeliness and effectiveness of preventive measures. When establishing the risk observatory, the IAP highlighted the importance of establishing strong networks with other local and overseas partners to build on existing efforts and tap on their domain expertise. The risk observatory should also study international trends and not just focus on Singapore or Asia, as risks which emerge overseas may subsequently appear in Singapore.

Recommendation 4: Ensure sustainability of the WSH Institute through strong partnership with stakeholders

11 The WSH institute must be relevant for society. Therefore the IAP suggested that the institute should continue to work in close partnership with the Ministry of Manpower, WSH Council and the industry stakeholders from the upstream identification and prioritization of needs to the downstream communication and dissemination of knowledge and solutions. The IAP emphasized the need to garner strong support from tripartite partners to seek buy-in for research findings, to ensure that they are translated to practices on the ground. As research outcomes may not always be immediately evident, it is important for the Institute to formulate a communications plan to regularly update stakeholders on research developments and milestones. In the longer term, the Institute should also engage international stakeholders and researchers, and publish timely and relevant reports to provide the government, industry and other stakeholders with the latest trends, research outcomes and best practices. The WSH Institute must be able to show its relevance and value to the business community and the government, through a timely and effective evaluation process, which will help ensure the sustainability of the WSH Institute.

Recommendation 5: Further build on framework to track WSH performance

12 The IAP noted that Singapore should continue to build capabilities to accurately track WSH performance so as to provide evidence-based intervention and engagement programmes.

13 The panel recommended that Singapore explore ways to build upon existing WSH performance evaluation capabilities and conduct in-depth studies to review existing national WSH initiatives, including enforcement and engagement programmes. Singapore could, in addition to existing lag indicators of WSH performance, identify, develop and track leading indicators of WSH performance, which would help Singapore formulate more preventive and less reactive WSH initiatives.

Building Progressive and Pervasive WSH Culture in Singapore

Recommendation 6: Further WSH culture development to beyond the workplace

14 The IAP pointed out that culture transcends work-life boundaries. A person who prioritises safety and health in his daily life will similarly prioritise safety and health at work. It is therefore important to

complement efforts to develop WSH culture with efforts to develop safety and health culture beyond the workplace.

15 The IAP advised that safety and health values should be inculcated from young. Safety and health messages could be included in the educational curriculum of children, when they are more ready to accept new values and beliefs. Safety and health values inculcated from young would stay with the individual for life and naturally translate to a greater emphasis on safety and health when the individual enters the workforce.

Recommendation 7: Government to take the lead in WSH culture building

16 The IAP praised the efforts underway to make WSH a requirement in government procurement and to establish standards in health and safety which all government partners must comply. However, the panel felt that more could be done by the government to take the lead in WSH culture building. For example, culture building initiatives could first be implemented in all government departments. The initiatives and outcomes could be tracked and shared with industry so that they could be persuaded of the benefits.

Recommendation 8: Identify leaders to champion WSH culture building

17 The IAP agreed that leadership development was crucial to the building of a progressive and pervasive WSH culture in Singapore. On top of developing “official leaders”, who were management staff in an organisation, the panel suggested that Singapore also explore identifying “opinion leaders”, who might not necessarily be in positions of authority, but were able to influence their peers in the WSH movement.

Recommendation 9: Promote personal ownership of WSH outcomes

18 Without prejudicing the primary responsibility of employers to provide a healthy and safe working environment, it is essential to engage the workforce in health and safety issues and encourage them to take ownership of their own personal safety and health as well as that of others. To improve WSH outcomes, workers must be aware of risks and be able to contribute to the assessment of risks and take appropriate action. However, the panel cautioned that in the Singapore context, we would need to take into account the diverse nature of the workforce. This was especially so as foreign workers may have a different perception of what are acceptable risks. As such, outreach to these workers will be especially important.

CONCLUSION

19 Singapore has made significant inroads into the improvement of WSH standards and performance, as envisaged in WSH 2018. This includes ensuring a safe and healthy workplace for everyone, and being a country renowned for best practices in workplace safety and health. The IAP commended Singapore’s continued efforts to share WSH best practices and communicate WSH commitments to other countries. These efforts will contribute to the success of the national culture strategy in the longer term

20 While continued progress will be challenging, it is timely and feasible for Singapore to enter the next phase. Singapore has positioned itself to make the next leg of its WSH journey and the IAP hopes that this set of recommendations will contribute to that effort. The IAP looks forward to the

adoption of its recommendations by the Singapore Government and their implementation by all stakeholders.

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