

**7TH MEETING
INTERNATIONAL
ADVISORY PANEL 2020
FOR WORKPLACE SAFETY AND HEALTH**



**REPORT OF
THE 7TH MEETING OF THE INTERNATIONAL ADVISORY PANEL
FOR WORKPLACE SAFETY AND HEALTH**

INTRODUCTION

1 The International Advisory Panel (IAP) for Workplace Safety and Health (WSH) was formed in 2006 with the following terms of reference:

- a. Advise on significant trends and developments in workplace practices that would impact 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 Six IAP meetings (2006, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2016 and 2018) have been held. These meetings contributed significantly to the advancement of WSH standards and outcomes in Singapore. Recommendations from the IAP were instrumental in the formulation of the national strategy for WSH in 2008, the establishment of the WSH Institute in 2011 and the WSH 2028 strategy in 2018.

SEVENTH IAP MEETING

3 Due to COVID-19, the seventh IAP meeting was held virtually over three sessions on 22 October, 26 October and 6 November 2020. The IAP (see list of members at Annex) discussed and provided valuable inputs on the need to strengthen WSH in a post-COVID world, focusing on the three main areas of:

- a. New WSH requirements due to the COVID-19 pandemic;
- b. New WSH priorities in the post-COVID world; and
- c. Addressing existing WSH challenges.

4 The IAP commended Singapore's efforts to manage the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the sustained progress made in recent WSH performance. The IAP acknowledged that the health aspect of WSH would need to be expanded beyond the traditional scope of occupational health issues to include WSH priorities such as addressing workforce mental health, managing chronic diseases and preventing infectious disease transmission at

workplaces. Notwithstanding, the IAP members highlighted the need to continue efforts on accident prevention as Singapore recovers from the effects of COVID-19.

5 The IAP offered three key recommendations to strengthen Singapore's WSH in a post-COVID world.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendation 1: Strengthen Workplace Resilience Against Infectious Diseases

6 The IAP recognised that strengthening workplace resilience against infectious diseases was critical both under the current COVID-19 crisis, and also to manage a future Disease X¹. Resilient workplaces would be better able to prevent disease transmission in the workplace, while adapting quickly to sustain operations as much as possible.

Increase Synergy between WSH and Public Health

7 The IAP recommended that MOM build on their experience of working with Public Health authorities to ensure a complementary approach between public and occupational health policies in combating infectious disease management in the workplace environment. The core WSH skillsets of risk management through a hierarchy of controls could be applied to managing infectious disease transmission in the workplace. The experience to date of responding to COVID-19 should be formally reviewed - both in terms of what went well and what particular challenges emerged, to further enhance preparedness in anticipation of Disease X. In doing so, it is important not to assume that Disease X will present the same characteristics as COVID-19.

8 The IAP noted that Singapore's existing WSH legislation requires employers to take effective measures to protect their employees against harmful effects of infectious agents². Hence, the IAP recommended that MOM complements the legal requirement by working closely with employers and building owners to develop timely guidelines for workplace

¹ Disease X is a placeholder name adopted by the World Health Organisation to represent a currently unknown pathogen that could cause a serious international epidemic in future

² WSH (General Provision) Regulations, Reg 3

pandemic preparedness. This could include sharing information with industry on transmission hotspots, such as locker rooms and toilets, for more targeted prevention measures.

9 The IAP supported Singapore's implementation of early warning systems (e.g. wastewater testing) and quick response processes (e.g. rapid testing of close contacts at workplace) to isolate potential infection clusters. The ability to implement such monitoring systems quickly creates more confidence in relaxing control measures earlier, and thereby reduces fatigue from prolonged and intensive control measures.

Enhance Companies' Pandemic Preparedness

10 The IAP recommended that companies needed to enhance pandemic preparedness, both now and in the longer term. This means preparing risk management and quick response strategies for infectious disease, and testing readiness through drills regularly, as part of their business continuity plans. Some of the areas which companies might need to address include:

- a. Incorporating infectious disease management into workplace risk assessments;
- b. Preparing for quick transitions into sustained remote work arrangements;
- c. Considering engineering and infrastructure controls to reduce the risk of infectious disease transmission, such as ventilation, filtration and sanitisation systems (for building owners);
- d. Maintaining sufficient levels of essential equipment and personal protective equipment, to be resilient against supply chain disruptions; and
- e. Enhancing employees' disease prevention knowledge, so that they can better evaluate and react to the health risks, and take greater ownership in addressing them.

Train WSH Inspectors in Infectious Disease Risk Management

11 The IAP recommended that WSH inspectors' roles and competencies are developed, to cover the new challenges of assessing the effectiveness of employers' management of infectious disease risks, remote working, mental health and well-being issues. These new and expanded roles will require training which will need to include softer skills of communication, coaching and public health training. Inspectors will need to balance their traditional enforcement role with educating stakeholders on managing these health risks in order to achieve the desired behaviours.

12 The COVID-19 crisis had shown that WSH inspectors could bridge the gap between WSH and public health policies and practices. By working in close partnership with the

employers and workers, WSH inspectors could promote a collaborative, evidence-based effort at the workplace to address infectious disease risks. This could entail identifying areas of heightened transmission risk, or developing measures regarding personal sanitation, safe distancing, proper ventilation, etc.

13 The IAP emphasised the importance of building in capacity to be agile in adapting to evolving epidemiological information, especially at the start of a new infectious disease outbreak. Any new infectious disease would present unknowns and navigating the learning process well would help in marshalling an effective workplace response. Given the increased demands on WSH inspectors, it would also be important to prioritise carefully and ensure adequate resourcing for MOM to meet the expanded requirements.

Recommendation 2: Enhance Workforce Mental Health Support

14 The IAP recommended that companies should incorporate psychosocial, mental health and well-being as part of their Risk Assessment and Risk Management frameworks. This would allow companies to identify stressors, develop strategies to address the varied types of mental stressors workers face in their respective job functions, and evaluate the effectiveness of intervention programmes. Government could play a role by creating tools³ to help companies identify key stressors and evaluate mental well-being scores over time.

15 Mental health issues among the workforce could have a great impact on businesses' cost and productivity.⁴ To address the stressors that workers face due to prolonged work-from-home and the blurring of work-life boundaries, the IAP recommended that guidelines be developed on how companies can support their workers' mental health better through extended periods of remote work. The IAP preferred this approach of using guidelines over rigid rules (such as 'right to disconnect' laws) that did not account for varied work-life patterns and preferences of employees, and could inadvertently add to workers' stress. A key issue was to ensure the right balance of control, flexibility and understanding that when working from home in pandemic situations, workers may have to juggle other responsibilities as well as those work-related (e.g. childminding). Some areas which the guidance could cover include:

³ MOM's Workplace Safety and Health Institute is in the midst of piloting a web-based psychosocial health assessment tool (i.e. iWorkHealth) for companies and their employees to identify common workplace stressors.

⁴ The IAP shared that in Finland, about 30% of lost workdays were due to mental health issues.

- a. The importance of facilitating continuous dialogue between supervisors and teams to set work expectations and norms for communications and workflow;
- b. The need to reach out to employees so they do not feel socially isolated and can receive proper mentoring and guidance, especially for less experienced workers;
- c. The need for companies to create avenues where workers can share their concerns and mental health challenges openly; and
- d. Providing access to support and assistance programmes such as ‘mental health first-aiders’ online support groups, counselling hotlines, educational talks to build workers’ mental resilience, and safe off-site working spaces for those with uncondusive home environments.

Recommendation 3: Re-focusing on Traditional WSH

16 The IAP noted that Singapore’s number of workplace fatalities did not reduce significantly despite several months of low economic activities due to Covid-19. This underlined the need for Singapore to maintain vigilance in WSH while managing new risks brought about by COVID-19. The IAP supported MOM’s efforts to progressively implement the WSH 2028 recommendations.

Tackle Major Injury Trends

17 While Singapore’s workplace fatality rate improved⁵ over the past four years, the workplace major injury rate worsened⁶. Slips, Trips and Falls (STF) remained the top cause of both major and minor injuries, and the number of STF major injuries increased by 40% in the past four years. To better tackle STF issues, the IAP recommended that MOM allocate more resources to conduct deeper investigations into STF accidents, to understand the root causes of this growing problem and develop a more effective strategy to arrest the rising trend.

Place Greater Expectations and Accountability on Company Leadership

18 To attain workplace injury reduction targets, the IAP recommended placing greater expectations and accountability on company leadership, to spur prevention efforts. The IAP supported the development of guidance or an Approved Code of Practice on ‘WSH Duties of

⁵ The workplace fatal injury rate declined from 1.9 per 100,000 workers (66 fatal injuries) in 2015 to 1.1 per 100,000 workers (39 fatal injuries) in 2019, the lowest level recorded yet.

⁶ The workplace major injury rate increased from 17.6 per 100,000 workers (597 major injuries) in 2015 to 18.1 per 100,000 workers (629 major injuries) in 2019.

Company Directors', to educate and engage company directors on their responsibilities to ensure that WSH risks are effectively managed and how they can assure themselves that they are. Other actions might include regular briefings and discussions on WSH in board meetings, ensuring periodic audits of WSH practices, and requiring management to take into account contractors' WSH records when awarding contracts and developing supply chains.

CONCLUSION

19 The IAP agreed that Singapore had achieved improvements in WSH performance and COVID-19 management through the concerted efforts of all stakeholders. Looking to the future in the recovery phase, the IAP shared that enhancing workplace preparedness to guard against future infectious diseases was vital, along with enhanced mental health support for the workforce in view of the extended work-from-home phase. The challenge would be to identify, anticipate, develop and implement strategies to both harness opportunities and address the new and increased risks that the post-COVID operating environment might bring for WSH. While managing the new WSH risks that arose due to COVID-19, the IAP stressed the importance of continued efforts to rejuvenate and sustain businesses' attention on accident prevention in the COVID-19 recovery phase.



ANNEX – PROFILE OF IAP MEMBERS

IAP Chair



Mrs Josephine Teo

**Minister for Manpower
Second Minister for Home Affairs**

Republic of Singapore

Mrs Josephine Teo was appointed Minister for Manpower and concurrently the Second Minister for Home Affairs on 1 May 2018. She is also a member of the National Jobs Council and the Future Economy Council.

Mrs Teo previously served in the Prime Minister's Office and the Finance, Transport and Foreign Affairs ministries. In PMO, she coordinated whole-of-government efforts to better support marriage and parenthood. This led to significant enhancements in pre-school subsidies, parental leave provisions, medical care of young children and support for assistive reproductive technologies (ART).

As Minister of State for Finance, Mrs Teo coordinated the Government's successful implementation of the Pioneer Generation Package. As Senior Minister of State for Transport, she chaired the Changi 2036 Steering Committee to enhance the Singapore's position as a leading global air hub. As Chairperson of the Public Transport Tripartite Committee, Mrs Teo ensured the effective transition to the Bus Contracting Model and the establishment of the Singapore Bus Academy.

A member of Parliament since 2006, Mrs Teo was formerly Chairman of the Government Parliamentary Committee for Education and Assistant Secretary – General of the National Trades Union Congress (NTUC). Mrs Teo was concurrently Chief Executive Officer of the not-for-profit organisation Business China, a platform launched by then Minister Mentor Lee Kuan Yew and then China Premier Wen Jiabao to strengthen Singapore's bicultural foundation.

An alumna of Dunman High School and Raffles Junior College, Mrs Teo graduated from the National University of Singapore, winning several honours including the Rachel Meyer Book Prize for being the Best Woman Student. She obtained a Master of Science in Economics from the London School of Economics on scholarship from the Economic Development Board.

She is married and has three grown-up children. She enjoys creating memorable experiences for family and friends.



Mr Zaqy Mohamad

**Senior Minister of State
Ministry of Manpower
Ministry of Defence**

**Member of Parliament
Marsiling Yew-Tee GRC**

Mr Zaqy Mohamad was appointed Senior Minister of State in the Ministry of Manpower and Ministry of Defence in July 2020. He is also the Deputy Leader of the House. Prior, he served as Minister of State in the Ministry of National Development and Ministry of Manpower from May 2018 to July 2020, as well as the Deputy Government Whip.

A Member of Parliament (MP) since 2006, Mr Zaqy is currently an MP for Marsiling-Yew Tee Group Representation Constituency (GRC). He previously served in Chua Chu Kang GRC up till 2020, and was formerly Chairman of the Government Parliamentary Committee for Communications and Information.

In support of the business community, Mr Zaqy is Advisor to the Singapore Business Federation SME Committee, as well as the Singapore Malay Chambers of Commerce and Industry.

In addition, Mr Zaqy is Deputy Chairman of MENDAKI, which looks into the education and skills for the Malay community, working closely with partners and Government agencies across Singapore.

Prior to taking up political office, Mr Zaqy was a Partner in professional services firm Ernst & Young. He began his career in consulting at Arthur Andersen before moving on to IBM. He went on to hold various positions in the private sector, in technology and consulting.

An alumnus of Raffles Institution and Raffles Junior College, Mr Zaqy graduated from the Nanyang Technological University (NTU) with a Bachelor's degree in Electrical and Electronic Engineering, with a year in ESIEE Paris. He also holds a Master's degree in Financial Engineering from NTU and Carnegie Mellon University.

IAP Members



Mr Kevin Myers

President, International Association of Labour Inspection

Mr Kevin Myers has over 40 years of experience as an Occupational Safety and Health Labour Inspector in the UK where he has held a wide range of operational, policy and strategy posts including Chief Inspector of Construction and Director of Hazardous Installations responsible for regulation of offshore oil and gas, onshore chemicals, explosives and mining. He was Health and Safety Executive's (HSE) Deputy Chief Executive from 2008 until his retirement from HSE in 2016. His current portfolio includes being the President of International Association of Labour Inspection (IALI), a post he has held since 2014. Prior to that, he was IALI's Secretary-General from 2011 to 2014 and a Vice President from 2005 to 2011. He is also a Trustee of Mates in Mind, a charity concerned with mental health and wellbeing in construction and other sectors. Other on-going projects include being an advisor to the UK Government in the development of a new building safety regulatory regime in response to the Grenfell disaster, as well as the convenor of an ISO WG developing an ISO standard on travel risk management. He is also working with the ILO to support Myanmar modernise its OSH regulatory regime.



Dr Park Doo Yong

President of Korea Occupational Safety and Health Agency (KOSHA)

Dr Park is the President of Korea Occupational Safety and Health Agency (KOSHA) and the Professor at the Department of Mechanical Systems Engineering at Hansung University.

He has been a Professor of industrial health at the Hansung University since 1997. He was also the Director General of the KOSHA Research Institute from 2006 to 2008. In the course of his work, he had served as the President of the International Occupational Hygiene Association (IOHA) from 2016 to 2017 and the Korean Industrial Hygiene Association (KIHA) from 2015 to 2017. Over the past decade, he has been co-working with industrial health experts for the development and enhancement of industrial hygiene in the Asian region. He has played a key role to establish the Asian Network of Occupational Hygiene (ANOH) and had served as its President from 2014 to 2017.

He received his Master of Public Health (MPH) from School of Public Health, Seoul National University and Doctoral from the School of Public Health, University of Michigan.



Ms Michelle Baxter
Chief Executive Officer, Safe Work Australia

Ms Michelle Baxter is the Chief Executive Officer of Safe Work Australia, the national policy body tasked with improving work health and safety and workers' compensation arrangements across Australia since November 2015.

Underpinning the work of the Agency is the belief that all workers, regardless of their occupation or how they are engaged, have the right to a healthy and safe working environment. In her role, Ms Baxter also advocates for the effective design of work and work systems, and the systematic management of risks, allowing workers to lead productive working lives.

Ms Baxter, a qualified lawyer, has more than 25 years of public sector experience including as Group Manager in the former Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations (DEEWR), Group Manager responsible for agency change with the Fair Work Ombudsman and Group Manager, Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Taskforce with DEEWR. She has also previously held positions such as Commonwealth Member, Safe Work Australia; Chair, Safe Work Australia's Strategic Issues Group on Workers' Compensation; a member of the Asbestos Safety and Eradication Council, and Commissioner, Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission.



Dr David Michaels
Professor, Department of Environmental and Occupational Health, Milken Institute School of Public Health, George Washington University

Dr David Michaels is an epidemiologist and Professor of Environmental and Occupational Health at the Milken Institute School of Public Health of George Washington University. He served as Assistant Secretary of Labor for the Occupational Safety and Health Administration from 2009 to 2017, the longest serving in the agency's history. From 1998 to 2001, Dr. Michaels was Assistant Secretary of Energy for Environment, Safety and Health, charged with protecting the workers, community residents, and environment in and around the nation's nuclear weapons facilities. In that position, he was the chief architect of the historic initiative to compensate nuclear weapons workers who were sickened by radiation, beryllium, and other toxic exposures.

Much of Dr Michaels' work has focused on protecting the integrity of the science underpinning public health, safety, and environmental protections. On this topic, he is the author of the recently published *The Triumph of Doubt: Dark Money and the Science of Deception* (Oxford University Press, 2020).



Mr Wiking Husberg

International Consultant on Occupational Safety and Health

Mr Wiking Husberg (M.Sc Eng) is an international consultant on occupational safety and health (OSH).

He started working with OSH in 1973 as a safety engineer with the Finnish Government in the National Board of Labour protection. He has cooperated with the Nordic and European countries concerning machine safety, standardisation and market surveillance. Consultancy work had taken him in the eighties to the Eastern European countries, which now has joined the EU. He was Chief Technical Advisor with an ILO OSH project in English-speaking Africa and Team Leader with the European Union/TACIS in Russia in the nineties. He spent nine years as the Senior occupational safety and health specialist in Moscow with the ILO Subregional Office for Eastern Europe and Central Asia before returning to work as a Ministerial Advisor on OSH in the Finnish Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Dept of OSH in 2012-2017.

Presently he is working with a Nordic Group of labour inspectors developing practical recommendations for inspectors concerning Future Forms of Work. He is a Steering Committee member of the Global Coalition on OSH and a member of the International Advisory Panel for Workplace Safety and Health for Singapore.



Ms Sarah Albon

Chief Executive, Health and Safety Executive, United Kingdom

Ms Sarah Albon, a civil servant with a strong commitment to the delivery of effective and accountable public services, took up the post as the Chief Executive of the Health & Safety Executive in September 2019.

Prior to this, she was the Chief Executive of the Insolvency Service from February 2015, guiding the agency through a period of major transformative change and leading the response to a number of high-profile corporate failures, including the liquidations of Carillion and British Steel.

Before undertaking these Chief Executive roles, Sarah spent much of her career working in the Ministry of Justice and its predecessor departments, including most recently as Director of Strategy & Change for Her Majesty's Courts and Tribunals Service. Her work scope in those departments spanned many areas including policy, strategy, finance and operational delivery.



Dr Ralf Franke

**Corporate Vice President and Corporate Medical Director
Head of Environmental Protection, Health Management & Safety
Siemens AG**

**General Practitioner, Occupational Physician and Specialist for
Occupational Safety**

Dr Ralf Franke started with Siemens AG as the Head of Corporate Human Resources Health Management in Feb 2009 and moved on to Head of HR EHS – Environmental Protection, Health Management and Safety in August 2009.

He was a professional soldier and had officer training at the German Federal Armed Forces from 1983 to 1999. He studied Medicine at the University Mainz and had his training at the German Federal Armed Forces Hospital in Ulm. He did his doctorate in 1992, finished his specialist training for general medicine in 1996 and for occupational medicine in 2000. Since 2009, he has been a specialist for occupational safety. Dr Franke has worked in executive positions in occupational health management and occupational safety with MTU Aero Engines GmbH and Daimler AG before joining Siemens AG in 2009.