



The National Archives of Singapore (NAS) is the official custodian of public records of national or historical significance including documents, photographs, plans, maps, oral histories and audio-visual recordings. The archives presented by NAS allow current and future generations to see, hear and remember the decisions, actions and memories of Singapore, its government and the people. Discover more archives at Archives Online: <http://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/>.

Published by:
The Occupational Safety and Health Division (OSHD)
of the Ministry Of Manpower

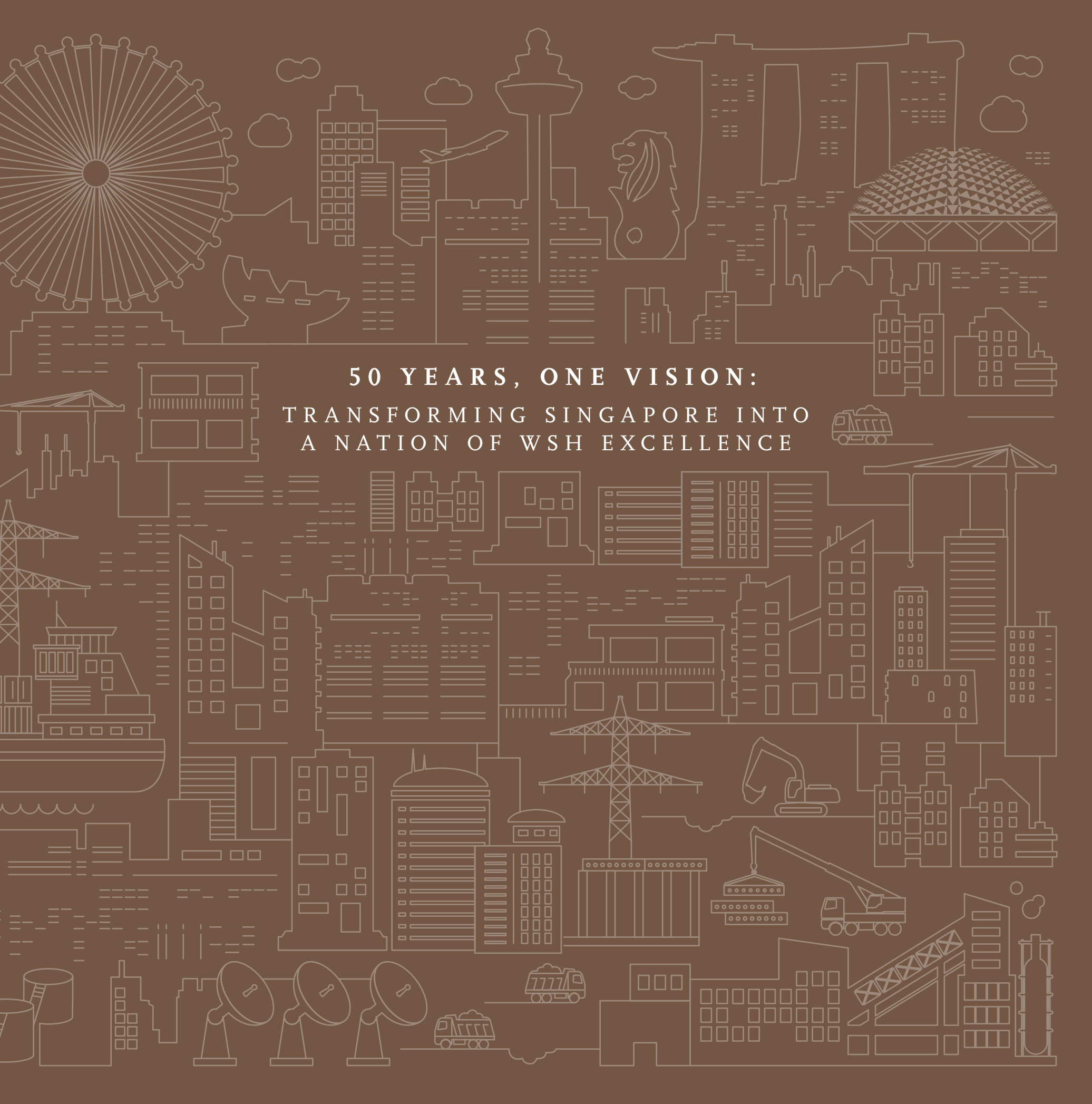
Design and Production by Silicon+

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the written permission of the publisher. All rights reserved.

©Copyright 2016
The Occupational Safety and Health Division

Printed and bound in Singapore

ISBN: 978-981-09-8707-7



50 YEARS, ONE VISION:
TRANSFORMING SINGAPORE INTO
A NATION OF WSH EXCELLENCE

CONTENTS

02	—	Foreword by Prime Minister, Mr. Lee Hsien Loong
04	—	Foreword by Minister for Manpower, Mr. Lim Swee Say
06	—	Foreword by Commissioner for Workplace Safety and Health, Er. Ho Siong Hin
08	—	Introduction
10	—	A Young Nation Rises to Challenges (1965–1974)
32	—	Growing to Meet Industry and Population Needs (1975–1984)
54	—	Evolving Alongside the Industry (1985–1994)
74	—	Staying Adaptive in the New Millennium (1995–2004)
98	—	Reforming Our Workplace Safety and Health Landscape (2005–2014)
126	—	Championing Workplace Safety and Health Standards on an International Scale (2015–Future)
138	—	The Resounding Voices of WSH
148	—	Closing Words
150	—	Editorial Team
151	—	Acknowledgements
152	—	References



The Occupational Safety and Health Division (OSHD) is a division under the Ministry of Manpower that promotes Occupational Safety and Health at the national level. OSHD assists employers, employees and all other stakeholders to identify, assess, and manage Workplace Safety and Health risks so as to eliminate death, injury and ill-health. OSHD is also the World Health Organization Collaborating Centre for Occupational Health, and the International Labour Organization-CIS National Centre for Singapore.

FOREWORD BY PRIME MINISTER

In just 50 years, Singapore's economy has grown into one of the most developed and vibrant in the region. Singaporeans today can pursue fulfilling and rewarding careers in many industries – from banking and finance, retail and hospitality, and even energy and chemicals.

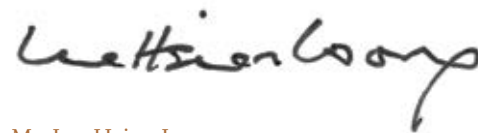
But economic progress must not come at the cost of our workers' safety and health. Over the past five decades, Workplace Safety and Health (WSH) in Singapore has improved in step with our economy. Our approach to safety and health, be it enforcement or engagement, has evolved over the years. Many of these changes were deliberate and planned; but a few, unfortunately, were spurred by tragic accidents.

This book tells the Singapore WSH journey. It is a journey made possible only because of a strong tripartite partnership – Government, employers and workers, coming together to keep every worker safe and healthy, so that we can all enjoy the fruits of our labour. We can celebrate the milestones in our journey. For example, we set up the industry-led WSH Council in 2008, which now plays a key role in promoting awareness of good WSH systems and practices, setting standards and building capabilities of companies. We established the WSH Institute in 2011. It provides

evidence for WSH policies, solutions for businesses to manage safety and health issues at their workplaces, as well as anticipate new and emerging WSH trends. These efforts have made our workplaces safer, and reduced workplace injuries and fatalities.

However, we are far from as good as we should be. Many other countries have better workplace safety records. Each time I read of a workplace accident, I ask myself whether that was preventable, and if so, why we allowed it to happen.

Even one injury is still one too many. I am glad that our tripartite partners have committed themselves to the Vision Zero movement. We must continue to improve WSH to safeguard the well-being of our workers. I urge everyone to do our part and strive towards a culture of prevention to make Vision Zero a reality for every worker, in every workplace.



Mr. Lee Hsien Loong
Prime Minister

“Economic progress must not come at the cost of our workers’ safety and health. Over the past five decades, WSH in Singapore has improved in step with our economy and we must continue to improve WSH to safeguard the well-being of our workers.”



FOREWORD BY MINISTER FOR MANPOWER

Just over 10 years ago, Singapore had a high workplace fatality rate of 4.9 per 100,000 employed persons in 2004. With the strong support of our tripartite partners, we brought it down to 1.9 in 2015. It is a big improvement. However, the journey towards excellence in Workplace Safety and Health (WSH) will never end, because every life is precious, and every fatality is one too many.

We launched the Vision Zero movement in 2015, which aims to develop a mind set that all injuries and ill-health due to work can be prevented. Some had challenged us that Vision Zero is not realistic. They reminded us that zero fatality had not been and will never be achieved by any country, including Singapore, at the national level. They are probably correct. However, while it may not be possible at the national level, it is certainly possible to achieve Vision Zero at the enterprise level, even at the industry level, if we all work hard and are committed to the cause.

This is why we are determined to spread the Vision Zero movement on the ground. Imagine, if many more enterprises and industries can make their workplaces accident-free, the sum total of these Vision Zero enterprises and industries must mean

safer workplaces and fewer accidents at the national level, bringing us a step closer to this improbable vision of zero fatality in our nation.

This book tells the journey of safeguarding the lives of our workers over the last 50 years, and the story of the passionate people behind this shared cause. Their tireless efforts have ensured that fewer lives were lost at work and more workers were able to go home safely to their families at the end of each working day.

Let us build on the foundation of these pioneers, and strive for Vision Zero to create safer and healthier workplaces for all workers in Singapore.



Mr. Lim Swee Say
Minister for Manpower

“It is certainly possible to achieve Vision Zero at the enterprise level, even at the industry level, if we all work hard and are committed to the cause.”



FOREWORD BY COMMISSIONER FOR WORKPLACE SAFETY AND HEALTH

This commemorative book is aptly titled “50 Years, One Vision: Transforming Singapore Into a Nation of WSH Excellence”. The chapters capture the shared spirit of our Workplace Safety and Health (WSH) stalwarts and the rigorous journey they went through together. With their efforts, Singapore has emerged as a nation renowned for its best practices in WSH.

Over the years, we have improved our WSH performance. This was no mean feat; employers and unions worked as one to build WSH capabilities, enhance regulatory frameworks, and reach out to a range of stakeholders. The immense contributions from our colleagues and the unwavering support of our tripartite partners have made safe and healthy workplaces a reality today. This book is a fitting tribute to them.

But having come so far, we cannot afford to be complacent. We must look ahead and chart our future as we continue our pursuit of WSH excellence. Tomorrow’s WSH landscape, together with changing a demography and new technology, will pose a different set of risks to an ageing but higher skilled workforce.

The Ministry of Manpower’s Occupational Safety and Health Division (OSHD) has been at the forefront

of these changes, launching industry-driven initiatives such as Total WSH and Vision Zero, together with the WSH Council and the WSH Institute. These two bodies offer updated solutions while retaining expertise in addressing existing risks. Their partnerships with industries will continue to keep companies and WSH practitioners at the heart of our WSH developments, just like the last 50 years.

The journey towards WSH excellence has been a meaningful and worthwhile one for us at OSHD, and we will soldier on with relentless passion and determination. We hope our readers will enjoy this book as much as we enjoyed sharing our story. More importantly, we hope this book will provide the inspiration for others to write new chapters of our WSH story as we move towards the vision of “A Healthy Workforce in a Safe Workplace”.



Er. Ho Siong Hin
Commissioner for Workplace Safety and Health
and Divisional Director of the Occupational
Safety and Health Division

“The journey towards WSH excellence has been a meaningful and worthwhile one for us at OSHD, and we will soldier on with relentless passion and determination.”





INTRODUCTION

To a young nation, Workplace Safety and Health (WSH), or the area concerning the safety, health and welfare of workers, had not always been a priority. Indeed, the journey to inculcate WSH in Singapore was defined by long, winding turns and no shortage of challenges.

Preceding Singapore's independence, regulations for occupational safety and workmen's compensation had already been established as early as the 1920s. Modelled after British labour laws, these ordinances became the starting point in the nation's wide-ranging efforts to make safety and health integral to every workplace.



TOP:
Samsui women laboured in construction sectors as early as the 1930s, contributing significantly to Singapore's building foundation.

With every new decade thereafter, the WSH landscape grew by leaps and bounds, adapting to the challenges of each time period. New strategies and initiatives were drawn to transform Singapore into a Nation of WSH Excellence.

The road was a voyage of many threads. It was paved by a multitude of people, voices and perspectives. The first strides were made by the nation-builders who pioneered the foundations of industrial safety and health while the nation was still in its infancy.

They were not alone. Gradually, various governmental departments, industry stakeholders, educators, professional associations and public interest groups came to play their part. It was their combined efforts that allowed Singapore to achieve one WSH milestone after another.

It took a span of almost 50 years and a string of inter-departmental evolutions before our Division – the Occupational Safety and Health Division (OSHD) under the Ministry of Manpower – took its present form. Conceived at the turn of the millennium prior to the introduction of the new WSH framework in 2005, OSHD now promotes WSH at a national level. We work closely with employers, employees and other stakeholders to identify, assess and manage WSH risks, and push for higher WSH standards in Singapore.

On top of working together with all entities within the WSH ecosystem, we also adopted a systemic and proactive approach to achieve four strategic outcomes – reducing workplace fatality and injury rates, advancing safety and health as an integral part of business, developing Singapore into a centre of excellence for WSH and inculcating a progressive and pervasive safety and health culture in Singapore.

Kindling all these efforts are a deep and shared belief that WSH is not only advantageous, but also an essential partner in the growth of Singapore. If industrial development was the engine that propelled Singapore into an economic success story, WSH is the backbone that protects the nation's workers amidst the breakneck pace of growth that has turned humble shacks into skyscrapers and muddy roads into highways.

The social and economic benefits of advancing WSH are abundantly clear. From an economic standpoint, the widespread adoption of good WSH practices has resulted in greater productivity and fewer

man-hours lost to injuries. Maintaining an excellent safety record also reflects well on businesses and adds to their competitiveness.

Our success in reducing the number of industrial accidents has inspired confidence among investors and made Singapore a more attractive place for businesses. This in turn delivers better jobs and economic opportunities to the reach of workers in Singapore.

We also believe that a safer and healthier working environment is a social imperative. Every individual in our workforce deserves to work in a safe environment and in good health, and to return home to his or her waiting families every day, regardless of choice of industry or profession.

Thus, it falls on each and every person to ensure that safety and health remains the top priority at any given moment. Prime Minister Mr. Lee Hsien Loong eloquently conveyed this message at the launch of the National WSH Campaign 2013: "Let us maintain the focus on improving workplace safety. Human beings matter to us. Human capital is our only resource. Never trade off workers' safety for cost or for time. Because every life counts and every worker matters."

Today, this call to action has reverberated in many ways. We have reduced our fatality rate to 1.8 per 100,000 employed persons earlier in 2014. A growing number of companies have made it their mission to integrate WSH into every aspect of their business. More individuals have also come aboard to take up the role of safety champions and to inculcate a progressive safety culture within their own work environments. This is the hallmark of our achievement.

With such an extensive WSH history, we turn the clock to the early days of Singapore's independence in 1965 and retrace the many steps that have brought us to where we are today.