

Sharing expertise

IOSH Singapore Branch was recently part of an educational trip to Australia to exchange health and safety knowledge. Former branch committee member Jason Oh reports.

We have made steady improvements in workplace safety and health performance in Singapore over the past decade. But things seem to have plateaued in the past few years at around 2.0 deaths per 100,000 workers (having been 1.8 in 2014 and 1.9 in 2016).

To try and achieve further improvement, the Ministry of Manpower and the Workplace Safety and Health (WSH) Council have launched the 'WSH 2018 plus' plan, which sets out to bring Singapore back on track to reduce the fatality rate to 1.8 per 100,000 employed people by 2018.

The Government has introduced stiffer enforcement penalties, balanced with enhanced support programmes to tackle immediate challenges. The Ministry has identified three key priorities: improving workplace safety and health performance in the construction industry, strengthening competence and building collective ownership.

To help achieve these aims, an 18-member delegation travelled to Australia to draw lessons from their experience in improving workplace safety and health in construction.

The trip was led by Singapore's Minister of State for the Prime Minister's Office and the Ministry of Manpower, Mr Sam Tan, and included representatives from the Ministry of Manpower, the WSH Council, Singapore Contractors

Association Limited, the Singapore Institution of Safety Officers and others.

As one of the key workplace safety and health partners in Singapore, IOSH Singapore Branch (whom I represented) also participated in this study trip.

What we did

Our activities included meeting with the Australian local authorities to find out how they communicate changes to workplace health and safety legislation that directors need to understand.

We also learned more about how simulated learning can be used to enhance workplace safety and health training by visiting the Building Leadership Simulation Centre in Melbourne, which is one of three centres of its kind in the world.

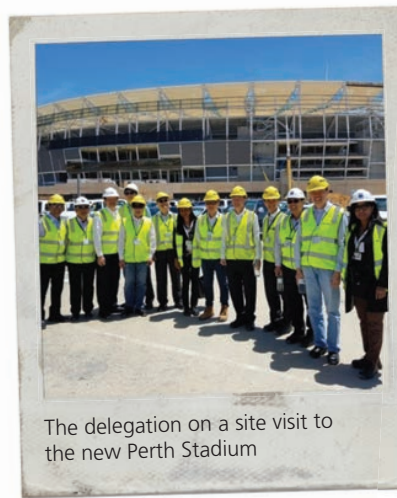
By visiting property and infrastructure company Lendlease, we also learned how positive leadership can drive safety and health performance. The company had achieved 44 consecutive months without a fatality, partly due to the implementation of a global minimum requirements framework to achieve consistent standards across operations.

We learned that Australia has established a system to encourage injured workers to return to work (RTW). Employers in Perth are supportive of RTW because there is no time limit on temporary incapacity payments, and

facilitating RTW is one of the few ways for them to stop the payments. It is also in the commercial interest of insurers to minimise compensation pay-out. In Adelaide, the "pension-for-life" model was scrapped and replaced with a two-year limit for less serious work accident compensation. Meanwhile, the new Return to Work Act in South Australia states that employers have to provide alternative employment for injured workers. If the employer fails to provide suitable employment – which is requested by the injured worker – within a reasonable timeframe, the worker can apply to the new South Australia Employment Tribunal for an order to the employer to provide suitable employment.

In my opinion this is a good move, as it is only reasonable that the employer bears the responsibility to compensate employees for any workplace injury and provides the injured workers with suitable employment when requested. Injured workers should also cooperate with the investigating officer to identify and trace back the root cause of an accident to "design out the hazards" up-front.

I shared details of the Australia study trip with Singapore Branch members during our AGM on 09 May. IOSH President Graham Parker also attended the meeting and presented an update on IOSH's new WORK 2022 strategy.



The delegation on a site visit to the new Perth Stadium



Minister of State Mr. Sam Tan (left) with Jason Oh