Objectives & Programme of the SHRE Conference

The conference had fulfilled its’ objectives to:

- Share good safety and health practices, technological advances and innovative ideas.
- Discuss emerging issues in safety and health.
- Share of competency requirements for safety and health professionals in research and educational institutions.
- Create awareness and sharing of best practices.

The conference programme consists of three sessions:

- Developing systems
- Implementing systems
- Implementing practices

SHRE CONFERENCE 2013

OVERVIEW

The 4th Conference on “Safety and Health in Research and Education: Enhancing Competencies – Systems & Practices” (SHRE) hosted by the Singapore Institute of Safety Officers (SISO) was held on 16th to 17th October 2013. The conference was attended by local, regional as well as international participants and speakers from countries such as Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Japan, Korea and Canada. The conference provided a platform to share strategic capabilities to develop sound safety and health management systems, which included leadership functions in research and educational institutions. The conference was graced by the presence of Guest of Honour, Mr Hawazi Daipi, Senior Parliamentary Secretary, Ministry of Education & Ministry of Manpower, Singapore.

Participants had the chance to showcase their posters on safety, health and environment research. There were also informative safety posters from SISO. Exhibitors and vendors (e.g. Dräger) were invited to showcase their safety and health equipment to give the participants an enriching experience.

The conference speakers had delivered a wealth of knowledge through their comprehensive and interesting presentations throughout the two-day conference. The participants also had the chance to interact with the speakers during the panel discussions.

Day 1 of the conference kicked off with a keynote address by Dr. Peck Thian Guan on creating a “Safety Culture” in the research and teaching environment through the three ‘C’s:

- Culture: Improve the safety culture throughout the research and education committee.
- Connection: Integrate safety into curriculums.
• Collaboration: Share best practices, exchange safety information across institutions/industries locally and internationally, and joint-research projects.

It was also highlighted that the institution’s commitment to “Safety Culture” may be further demonstrated by incorporating safety and health issues in postgraduate thesis defense assessment.

With the tone of “Safety Culture” set in place, the conference proceeded to discuss on developing and implementing safety and health systems and practices.

DEVELOPING SYSTEMS

The first speaker, Dr. Yukiko Nezu, shared on the analysis of the interaction between chemical usage with experimental operations and laboratory layout, and the influence of volatile solvents within the laboratory atmosphere. This study could help pave the way for better laboratory designs.

Mr. Hishamuddin Abdul Halim presented on the systematic chemical health risk assessment (CHRA) program for implementation in university laboratories. He evaluated the relationship between the degree of chemical exposure and the significance of health risk and he also highlighted the challenges in the implementation of the program.

In the context of contractor safety in universities, Dr. Fatma Lestari presented a risk-based approach adopted by Universitas Indonesia in the implementation of contractor safety management system that covered their high risk activities in construction, outdoor hygiene and indoor hygiene.

Assoc. Prof. Risuke Karima shared on accidents and incidents associated with the treatment of alkali metals and the derivatives, which provided timely reminder that the dangers of handling hazardous compounds do not end at the experimental phase; users should take caution during downstream processes, including clean-up and disposal.

IMPLEMENTING SYSTEMS

The second session of Day 1 focused on effective competency trainings for safety and health professionals, staff and students in research and educational institutions.

A review on health and safety education in universities presented by Prof. Yasushi Okubo summarized the effectiveness of utilizing different training methods in the deliverance of training content. Lectures are effective in imparting systemic knowledge, group based learning are effective in imparting structural knowledge, while project based learning promotes learner’s motivation and enhance the skill of the learner.

The increase in stakeholder’s safety competency has the potential to translate to a decline in accident and incident rates. As commented by Dr. Lee Kien Wah, competency trainings should be short, interesting and challenging to the participants to achieve efficacy. Competency trainings should also be structured by job specificities or levels to better cater to the needs of the participants, such as generic (e.g. fire safety training), specific (e.g. biological safety and chemical safety trainings) and specialized trainings (e.g. occupational first aider).

Furthermore, the substitution of classroom based safety training courses with those conducted online (e.g. the NUS Structured Safety Training System), as shared by Mr. Pramoth Chandrikamohan, has shown to reduce waiting time, provide dynamism, learning flexibility and accessibility to
the learner. It also met the increasing demand for safety training, increased productivity and cost savings for the university.

IMPLEMENTING PRACTICES

The final session of Day 1 presented examples where good practices have been implemented. In the emerging field of nanomaterial research, Dr. Michael Riediker emphasized on the protection strategies to curb the unconventional safety and health hazards when handling these nanomaterials. Some of these strategies include the substitution to less or non-hazardous alternatives, employing technology to separate the worker from the potential hazards (e.g. glovebox), and the organization effort to reduce interaction with the potential hazards.

The amelioration of safety audits using mobile technology like the Apple iPad in a research and educational institution, as presented by Mr. Rashidi Abdul Rahim, has shown to increase cost savings, enhancing productivity and improving service standards to the stakeholders.

KEYNOTE SPEECHES FOR SHRE & APSS

Day 2 of the SHRE conference began in conjunction with the opening of the 8th Asia Pacific Safety Symposium (APSS). This is the first time Singapore is hosting the APSS conference.

Problems, trends and solutions with regards to workplace safety and health (WSH) in Asia Pacific were discussed by Dr. Jukka Takala. There are safety and health concerns for new and emerging risks (e.g. nanotechnologies), new industries with risks (e.g. green jobs), as well as old risks with new concerns (e.g. combined exposures). It has been brought to the audience’s attention the discernment of perceived risk and real risk of a work-related activity.

One of the discussed solutions to manage the WSH problems in Asia Pacific was to have a total WSH service that is comprehensive and integrated. Prof. Chia Sin Eng shared the key benefits of having a comprehensive WSH service, which included a lengthened productive working life and an enhanced WSH culture. The comprehensive WSH service should include safety (physical work environment), health (personal health) and well-being (mental well-being and healthy behaviors) of employees.

PANEL DISCUSSIONS

There were panel discussions at the end of the morning and afternoon sessions, which were chaired by Mr. Saravanan Gunaratnam. One of the highlights of the discussions was the suggestion for safety, health and environment compliances to be incorporated as key performance indicators (KPIs) when determining the ranking of a university. There were also comments on increasing information exchanges, such as sharing of accidents and incidents, at international level not only through conferences but also through other means to increase awareness and learning.

The SHRE conference ended with a closing panel discussion where some intriguing suggestions were raised. Many participants had faced difficulties in conveying safety and health messages in their organizations and to stakeholders. Panel members suggested translating the safety and health indicators into stakeholders’ area of interest, such as the dollars and cents impact when safety and health measures are not implemented.
INTERNATIONAL ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

One of the highlights of the SHRE/APSS conference was the gathering of some international delegates to discuss on areas of collaboration and sharing of best practices on safety management system. Chaired by Dr. Peck Thian Guan, the invited attendees expressed their areas of interests, ranging from exchanging of information on accident statistics, adopting a student’s perception survey on safety and health of another institution, learning the chemical inventory of other universities, to harmonization of training. The collective objective was the continual improvement on the current practices and enhancement of the safety management system at their respective institutions. Although the interaction was brief, the bond of friendship was formed, and the exchange of ideas and information continued post-conference. Moving forward, this international Safety and Health in Research and Education (iSHRE) group could consider exchange programmes and peer reviews in the future.

CONCLUSION

The conference was successful in providing the opportunity for local, regional and international delegates to interact and share best practices, foster stronger relationships and collaborations to enhance the safety and health culture within research and educational institutions.

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The conference programme can be viewed at http://www.siso.org.sg/images/SHRE_FLYER_Final.pdf

Date: 8th November 2013