AN ACCIDENT AT WORK IS A TRAGEDY AT HOME

For Madam Ng, life is nothing but a daily struggle against sadness and despair. She has faced a number of challenges in her life. She lost her cab driver husband and suffered a debilitating stroke in 2008, but these are not the primary reasons for her grief.

Her heartbreak comes from the loss of her most filial son, Chu Da, who left school to start work and look after his ailing mother. In addition to making sure that her food and lodging were provided for, he gave her money every month to make sure that she had everything else she needed.

On 31 August 2011, Chu Da was sent to fix a cable connection for his company. He used a ladder to check the cables outside a customer’s flat. After a while, the customer heard a noise outside her flat and found him, lying on the floor, unresponsive and shivering. He died from head injuries two hours later at the hospital.

Madam Ng misses her youngest son every day, and shares that, “After he died, I was very sad. I couldn’t sleep every night. When I lost him, my heart broke.” She was very proud of Chu Da when she was told what a good worker he was, by his co-worker, “Auntie, your son is very obedient and our boss thinks very highly of him.”

One and a half years after Chu Da’s death, Madam Ng feels the pain as strongly as ever. She is still troubled by the thoughts that he should have gotten more supervision and support from other workers. Chu Da would still be alive if safety measures had been in place. Madam Ng’s current situation would also have been very different. Her story reminds us all that safety is important not only for each worker, but for their families that love and depend upon them.

If safety measures are not taken seriously, this story could be yours.
ONE CARELESS ACT CAN LEAD TO MONTHS OF TRAUMA

For the worker at the centre of our story, the months of treatment she had to endure for her serious burns were worse than the initial searing pain she felt.

It all started in 2011, when she was told to check a high-pressure pump at the end of her shift. As she went down a ladder into the pump area, her glasses fogged and she knew she should have waited for them to clear, but she pressed on. Upon reaching the pump, she was suddenly sprayed with a burst of boiling hot steam and water on her legs. Although she was wearing fire safety pants, they did not protect her from the hot spray.

She believed that the previous worker who had worked on the pump had left a flange open, allowing for the release of the water and steam. She knew she should have double-checked the flange, but it was too late. She immediately radioed for her supervisor, and proceeded to the nearest safety shower to cool her burns.

After the first check-up, she was sent home and told to go back for another check-up after a few days. When she returned, the doctor realised that she had serious nerve and skin damage. In the weeks that followed, she endured painful skin grafts. Each operation would leave her unable to move for days afterwards.

It was months before she could return to work, and she did so with a sense of caution and new respect for safety. To make sure that no one would suffer as she had, she shared her story with other workers and did all she could to increase safety at work.

Now a few years have passed. Her burns have mostly healed, but the discoloured skin on her thigh reminds her that accidents can happen in an instant, and that they don’t just happen to other people. If you are not careful, a similar accident could happen to you.
TRIP AND FALL
BE RESPONSIBLE FOR YOUR OWN AND YOUR CO-WORKERS’ SAFETY AT WORK

On that fateful evening, Ms SH was going to the storeroom of a fast food restaurant to stock up on chilli sauce, a trip she had made countless times without incident. However, this time as she walked into the storeroom, she tripped on something that should not have been there. Someone had placed a bun tray near the storeroom entrance, and she had not seen it when she entered the storeroom.

Through no fault of hers, Ms SH found herself sprawled helplessly on the floor, in shock and pain. As she fell, her glasses shattered upon impact with the floor and the broken pieces cut her face. She had been very lucky that these pieces did not cut her eyes.

Often, we think mostly of ourselves when it comes to safety, but unsafe actions can easily have an adverse effect on others. Keeping your workplace clean and tidy will help you and your co-workers to go home safe after work every day.

FALL FROM HEIGHTS
ACCIDENTS CAN HAPPEN WHEN YOU TAKE SHORTCUTS

Mr B is not only lucky to be alive, but also extremely fortunate that he is able to walk after a serious fall at work. On 1 February 2012, Mr B was asked to dismantle steel channel beams from some steel framework. He had been following the correct safety procedure early on in the process by securing his safety harness to a stable point when he removed the beams from a steel framework. When he unscrewed the last channel beam, he thought that it would be safe to just walk over a panel, since it was only less than 2m high. He slipped and fell before he reached the other end of the panel.

Mr B fractured his hips and injured his back in the fall, but it could have been worse. He could have been pierced by something sharp below, suffered a serious or fatal head injury, or permanently injured his spine by his dramatic and unexpected fall. When it comes to safety, there are no shortcuts. Keep yourself safe by following all the safety procedures in your workplace.

SNAP@MOM is a free and simple-to-use smartphone mobile application offered by the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) for you to report an unsafe work situation. You can use this application to take photographs of unsafe work practices and send them to the owners of the workplaces. This will help them to make their workplaces safer for their workers.

SNAP@MOM is available for the iPhone and Android platforms, and can be easily downloaded from either the iTunes App Store or Google Play.

SNAP YOUR WAY TO A SAFER SINGAPORE

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Worksite before and after an informant used the SNAP@MOM app.
HAVE YOU MET WITH AND SURVIVED A WORKPLACE ACCIDENT?

Share your experience with our readers. Tell us what happened, how you felt, and how this accident could have been prevented. Your story will be valuable, because all of us can learn from your experience and know what to look out for in our workplaces.

One winning letter will be selected and published. Don’t forget to include your full name, company name, address, contact number and work permit number. Send your letter to:

The Editor, iWSH
Workplace Safety and Health Council
Level 4, Ministry of Manpower Services Centre
1500 Bendemeer Road
Singapore 339946

Do you have a suggestion on how we can improve iWSH?

Tell us what you like best about the newsletter and how we can make it even better. Send your letter to:

The Editor, iWSH
Workplace Safety and Health Council
Level 4, Ministry of Manpower Services Centre
1500 Bendemeer Road
Singapore 339946

The Workplace Safety and Health Council was established on 1 April 2008 to raise WSH standards in Singapore. The Council comprises 18 leaders from the major industry sectors, the Government, unions and professionals from the legal, insurance and academic fields.

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Those interested in subscribing to the iWSH newsletter can write to WSH_iWSH@wshc.sg to be on the mailing list.

The results for iWSH Quiz in issue 111204 are out! Congratulations to all!

IWSH Quiz
Issue 111204 Winners

1. Naung Nay Myo Tun (Gxxxx898L)
2. Champaneri Amitkumar Harishbhai (Gxxxx244U)
3. Sundaram Murugesan (Gxxxx714G)
4. Adeline Yeo (Sxxxx119C)
5. Eng Boon Leng (Gxxxx218F)
6. Masumbilla Motaleb Sheikh (Gxxxx593Q)
7. Lee Wai Liang (Sxxxx063G)
8. Watanabe Ryo (Gxxxx939L)
9. Chim Tat Meng (Gxxxx919C)
10. Migaku Banka (Fxxxx040W)

All winners will be notified via email or phone.

Winning Letter

Greetings,

I am a construction worker from India and I am happy working in Singapore.

I read every issue of iWSH without fail. All the information on workplace safety and health is very useful to workers like me. Learning how to work safely at the worksite, how to wear our personal protective equipment correctly, and how to safely operate machines, help us to protect ourselves. I thank iWSH for this.

My dear co-workers! We need to be extra careful at the worksite and think of safety as the first priority. Please remember that we must all return back happily and healthily, just like the way we came here.

My heartiest thanks to iWSH!

I hope the iWSH team will continue their good work!

Yours sincerely,

RAJENDRAN VIJAYAKUMAR
19 April 2013

The author of this winning letter wins a $250 voucher.