

UNIT NO. 4

REPORTING OF OCCUPATIONAL DISEASES IN SINGAPORE

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ABSTRACT

Doctors play a critical role in the early recognition and reporting of occupational diseases. Singapore, like most countries, imposes a statutory requirement for the mandatory reporting of occupational diseases where the responsibility for notification to the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) rests with the employer and the physician who makes the diagnosis of an occupational disease. The list of 31 reportable occupational diseases is prescribed in the Workplace Safety and Health Act. A robust reporting system enables Singapore to identify and monitor persons at high risk so as to prevent occupational diseases. Timely reporting will also facilitate the compensation of workers with occupational diseases under the Work Injury Compensation Act.

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INTRODUCTION

Occupational diseases (ODs) occur as a result of exposure to physical, chemical, biological, ergonomic or psychosocial factors in the workplace. Common occupational diseases include occupational skin disorders, work-related musculoskeletal disorders, noise-induced hearing loss, heavy metal poisonings, solvent intoxications, heat disorders, occupational asthmas and certain cancers (see Table 1 for the type and number of cases confirmed from 2000 to 2009).

Workers employed in occupations with exposure to certain hazards (Table 2) are required under the Workplace Safety and Health (Medical Examinations) Regulations to undergo specific medical examinations¹. The medical examinations and tests help to detect workers with occupational disease or overexposure early, and ensure that workers remain fit for such work. These medical examinations are conducted by Designated Workplace Doctors (DWDs) registered with MOM. Almost all the cases of noise induced deafness and excessive absorption of chemicals are detected as a result of these regular medical examinations.

Table 1. Confirmed chronic occupational diseases in Singapore, 2000 - 2009

Type of Disease	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
TOTAL	527	546	504	495	380	517	657	602	855	468
Noise Induced Deafness	366	359	339	300	251	391	535	490	743	380
a) Early	354	345	323	294	247	384	527	485	741	375
b) Compensable	12	14	16	6	4	7	8	5	2	5
Occupational Skin Diseases	93	118	99	67	81	84	89	59	66	56
Excessive Absorption of Chemicals	22	36	12	20	6	24	5	3	11	16
Chemical Poisoning	1	-	11	-	-	-	-	-	8	-
Barotrauma	28	-	10	8	6	5	5	17	5	1
Compressed Air Illness	1	-	20	8	4	5	3	2	7	-
Occupational Lung Disease ¹	5	8	3	1	2	4	2	3	5	3
Work-related Musculoskeletal Disorders	3	3	6	10	7	3	8	25	5	3
Others	8	22	4	81 ^a	23 ^b	1	10	3	5	9

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Table 2
Prescribed Hazards Requiring Medical Examinations under the Workplace Safety and Health (Medical Examinations) Regulations

- | | |
|---|-------------------------------|
| 1. Arsenic & its compounds | 10. Manganese & its compounds |
| 2. Asbestos | 11. Mercury & its compounds |
| 3. Any occupation or process carried out using compressed air | 12. Organophosphates |
| 4. Benzene | 13. Perchloroethylene |
| 5. Bitumen | 14. Pitch |
| 6. Cadmium & its compounds | 15. Raw cotton |
| 7. Creosote | 16. Silica |
| 8. Excessive noise | 17. Tar |
| 9. Lead & its compounds | 18. Trichloroethylene |
| | 19. Vinyl chloride monomer |

Statutory duty to notify occupational diseases

In Singapore, the reporting of workplace accidents and occupational diseases is a legal requirement under the Workplace Safety and Health (Incident Reporting) Regulations. All workplaces are covered under these Regulations and employers have to report work-related deaths, injuries, dangerous occurrences and occupational diseases to MOM. All

registered medical practitioners are required to report any of the occupational diseases listed in the Workplace Safety and Health Act² to MOM within 10 days from the diagnosis of the disease (Tables 3 and 4). Doctors should also inform employers of the diagnosis to enable employers to comply with their statutory duty to notify occupational diseases to MOM. It is an offence to fail to make an incident report as required by the law*.

Table 3. Overview of reporting requirements under the WSH (Incident Reporting) Regulations

What to Report?	Who to Report?	What Needs to be Done?
A workplace accident that causes the death of an employee.	The employer of the deceased worker.	Notify the Commissioner immediately via phone or fax. AND Submit the incident report within 10 days of the accident via iReport.
A workplace accident that causes injury to an employee, who is then: Given more than three consecutive days of medical leave; or hospitalised for at least 24 hours.	The employer of the injured worker.	Submit the incident report within 10 days of the accident via iReport. If the employee subsequently dies from the injury, the employer must notify the Commissioner as soon as he/she knows of the employee's death.
A workplace accident that involves a self-employed person or member of public, causing him/her to die or sent to hospital for treatment of injury.	The workplace occupier.	Notify the Commissioner immediately via phone or fax. AND Submit the incident report within 10 days of the accident.
A dangerous occurrence.	The workplace occupier.	Notify the Commissioner immediately via phone or fax. AND Submit the incident report within 10 days of the incident via iReport.
An occupational disease.	The doctor who diagnosed the disease; and The employer of the person with the disease.	Submit the incident report within 10 days of diagnosis (Doctor) via iReport. Submit the incident report within 10 days of receiving the written diagnosis (Employer) via iReport.

Note: Employers or occupiers who reported a workplace incident are also required to keep records of the incident for at least 3 years.

Table 4. List of Reportable Occupational Diseases in Singapore

1. Aniline poisoning	16. Hydrogen Sulphide poisoning
2. Anthrax	17. Occupational skin diseases
3. Arsenical poisoning	18. Lead poisoning
4. Asbestosis	19. Liver angiosarcoma
5. Barotrauma	20. Manganese poisoning
6. Beryllium poisoning	21. Mercurial poisoning
7. Byssinosis	22. Mesothelioma
8. Cadmium poisoning	23. Noise-induced deafness
9. Carbamate poisoning	24. Occupational asthma
10. Carbon Bisulphide poisoning	25. Organophosphate poisoning
11. Chrome ulceration	26. Phosphorous poisoning
12. Chronic benzene poisoning	27. Poisoning from halogen derivatives of hydrocarbon compounds
13. Compressed air illness	28. Repetitive strain disorder of the upper limb
14. Cyanide poisoning	29. Silicosis
15. Epitheliomatous ulceration (due to tar, pitch, bitumen, mineral oil or paraffin or any compound, product or residue of any such substance)	30. Toxic anaemia
	31. Toxic hepatitis

* Non-compliance with the incident reporting requirements can be penalised with a fine up to \$5,000 for first offence, and a fine of up to \$10,000 or/and an imprisonment up to 6 months for a second or subsequent offence.

Purpose of reporting

A robust notification system for occupational accidents and diseases is necessary to ensure reliable data collection for an understanding of the extent and depth of the occupational safety and health (OSH) issues in the country. The notification, analysis of OSH statistics are integral parts of any national policy and system for OSH. It helps the authorities to identify persons and industries at risk to better manage established workplace hazards, as well as to identify new and emerging ones.

The reporting of occupational accidents and diseases allows investigations to be conducted to establish causality and active case finding to identify others who may also be at risk. It allows for institution of appropriate preventive measures and the monitoring of trends and early identification of emerging concerns. Furthermore, accurate and timely reporting will enable injured workers to exercise their rights to claim compensation and ensure that their claims can be processed expeditiously.

MOM's electronic reporting system – iReport

Introduced in March 2006, the ‘iReport’ is a national electronic reporting system, accessible at www.mom.gov.sg/ireport/. It is a convenient one-stop system for the reporting of work-related deaths, injuries, dangerous occurrences and occupational diseases for employers, occupiers and doctors. The key features of iReport are listed in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Key Features of iReport

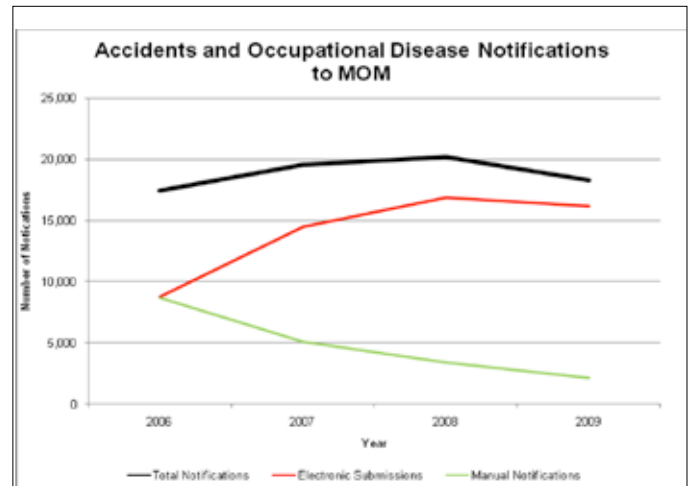
iReport

- One-stop reporting platform for occupational accidents, injuries and diseases
- Ease of submission – electronic rather than hardcopy
- User-friendly platform
- Allows SMS and email acknowledgement
- Platform to report all incidents in workplaces whether covered by WSH Act or not.

Since its launch, the system has been enhanced and it now allows victims to report their own accidents or appoint representatives to file an incident notification and for doctors to also report workplace injuries (even though this is not a statutory duty). Employees or members of the public can also file a notification on a workplace incident or an unsafe act. The proportion of submissions sent through electronic means has increased from about 50% in 2006 to more than 90% in 2009 (see Figure 2).

Doctors are also able to assess the iReport through the Health Professionals Portal (HPP) at www.hpp.moh.gov.sg.

Figure 2. Trends of accidents and occupational disease notification to MOM

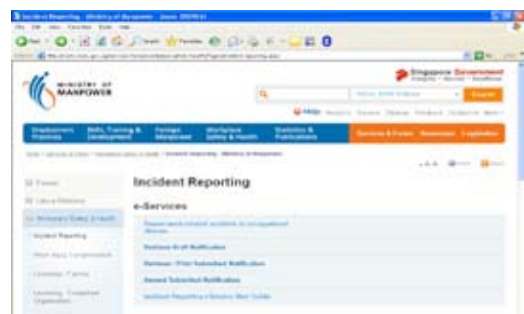


1st March 2006: WSH(IR) Reg requires notifications and accident reports to be filed under iReport system
 1st April 2008: WICA Reg requires notifications and accident reports to be filed under iReport system
 Feb 2010: Launch of enhanced iReport system. All hardcopy forms were removed from MOM website

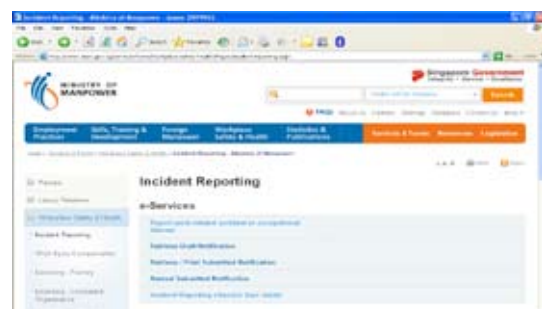
Figure 3. Step-by-step guide to use of i-Report – the Incident Reporting Process

Notes: For more information, refer to User Manual, Incident reporting (e-Service) at <http://www.mom.gov.sg/Documents/services-forms/Safety%20and%20Health/IR%20Services%20User%20Guide.pdf>

Step 1: Go to Incident reporting e-Services webpage <http://www.mom.gov.sg/services-forms/workplace-safety-health/Pages/incident-reporting.aspx>



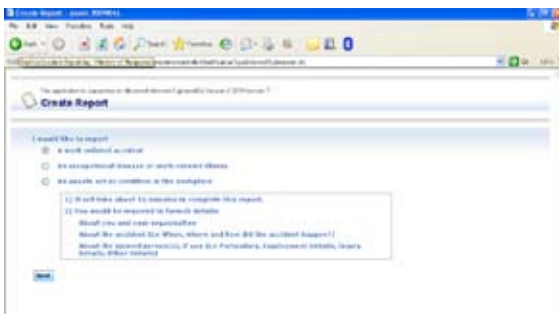
Step 2: Click “report work-related accident or occupational disease”



Step 3: Select an accident to report from the given categories



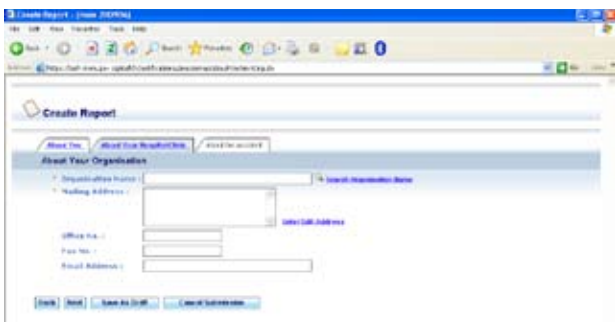
Step 4: Click “next”



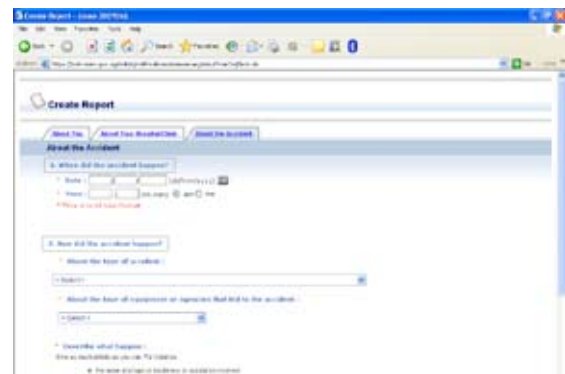
Step 5: Fill in all required particulars marked *



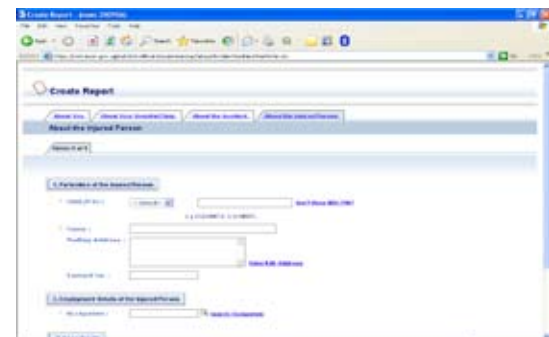
Step 6: Fill in all required information marked *. Click “next”



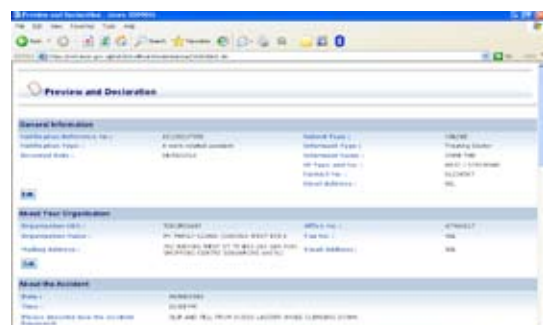
Step 7: Fill in all required information about the accident marked *



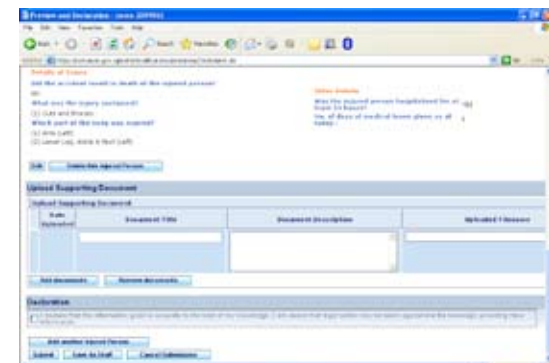
Step 8: Fill in all required information about the injured person



Step 9: Check to ensure all information are accurate



Step 10: Click “submit” at end of report



Diagnosing an occupational disease

The diagnosis and investigation of occupational diseases often requires detailed occupational histories, specialized tests and workplace visits to be conducted. Early detection is important in the prevention of occupational disease as control measures can be instituted sooner for the protection of the affected worker as well as other workers.

Workers with suspected or confirmed occupational or work-related disease may be referred to one of the occupational health clinics (Table 5) where they are seen by occupational physicians and specialists in the relevant disciplines. The clinic will assist in the confirmation of the diagnosis, manage the effects and complications from the workplace exposure, conduct workplace assessments where indicated, and provide recommendations on preventive measures to employer and worker so as to prevent recurrence.

MOM will be publishing a quick reference guide on occupational diseases for the diagnosis and management of work-related conditions in a clinical setting.

Table 5

Suspected medical condition	Occupational Health	Contact No.
Any work-related illness	Occupational Health Clinic Hougang Polyclinic	6355 3000
Any work-related illness	Occupational Health Clinic Geylang Polyclinic	6842 2440
Any work-related illness	Occupational Medicine Specialist Clinic Jurong Polyclinic	6355 3000
Occupational skin disease	Occupational Dermatoses Clinic National Skin Centre	6350 6666
Occupational lung disease	Occupational Lung Disease Clinic Tan Tock Seng Hospital	6357 7000
Occupational lung disease	Occupational Lung Disease Clinic Singapore General Hospital	6321 4402 6321 4377
Occupational Hearing Loss	Joint Occupational Deafness Clinic Tan Tock Seng Hospital	6357 7000
Work-related musculoskeletal disorders	Work-related Musculoskeletal Disorder (WRMSD) Clinic Tan Tock Seng Hospital	6357 7000
Occupational chemical exposure or poisoning	Joint Environmental Occupational Toxicology Clinic (JEOTC) Changi General Hospital	6850 3333

Work injury compensation in Singapore

Under the Work Injury Compensation Act (WICA)³, an employee who sustains injuries in a work-related accident or contracts an occupational disease can claim from his employers (i) medical expenses; (ii) temporary incapacity compensation, where he is paid medical or hospitalization leave wages; and (iii) permanent incapacity compensation, if any. Dependents of employees who die in a work-related accident or from an occupational disease can also claim death compensation.

The WICA provides a simple, low-cost and expeditious alternative to making a claim under Common Law. Unlike Common Law, WICA is a non-fault system. This means the employee does not need to prove that the employer was at fault for his injury to be eligible for compensation. He only needs to show that the injury arose out of and in the course of his employment. The compensation benefits are computed based on fixed formulae and capped under the Act.

Once an employee decides to pursue his claim under the WICA, he will generally no longer be able to lodge a civil claim against his employer for damages. In other words, he will not be able to double claim from WICA and common law.

A Guide to the Assessment of Traumatic Injuries and Occupational Diseases for Workmen's Compensation (GATIOD)⁴ is available to assist doctors in assessing incapacities in work-related injuries and occupational diseases.

CONCLUSIONS

Singapore has a comprehensive OSH framework with strong legislation, policies, structure and systems. A new workplace health strategy launched in April 2010⁵ identified the need for more comprehensive collection of data through strengthening of reporting mechanisms and providing greater compliance assistance in the recognition and diagnosis of occupational diseases. A robust reporting framework and comprehensive statistics will help to tackle and improve OSH issues and to the effectiveness of the OSH framework in the country. The list of OD in the WSHA and WICA are being reviewed for continued relevance and alignment to current developments.

Doctors have a duty to notify cases of occupational diseases. This will allow investigations to proceed and preventive measures to be instituted. Injured workers may also claim their due compensation. It is important for doctors to exercise their duty by notifying cases of ODs to MOM using iReport.

REFERENCES

1. Ministry of Manpower, Medical Monitoring at <http://www.mom.gov.sg/workplace-safety-health/worker-workplace-surveillance/workers-health-surveillance/Pages/default.aspx>*
2. Workplace Safety and Health Act at http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/non_version/cgi-bin/cgi_retrieve.pl?actno=REVED-354A&doctitle=WORKPLACE%20SAFETY%20AND%20HEALTH%20ACT&date=latest&method=part&sl=1*
3. Work Injury Compensation Act at http://statutes.agc.gov.sg/non_version/cgi-bin/cgi_retrieve.pl?actno=REVED-354&doctitle=WORK%20INJURY%20COMPENSATION%20ACT%0a&date=latest&method=part&sl=1*

4. A Guide to the Assessment of Traumatic Injuries and Occupational Diseases for Workmen's Compensation at <http://www.mom.gov.sg/Documents/safety-health/GATIOD-Fifth-Edition.pdf>*
5. Improving Workplace Health Management in Singapore WSH 2018. WSH Council https://www.wshc.sg/wps/themes/html/upload/cms/file/Improving_WSH_Management_Singapore.pdf*

**assessed on 10 Jan 2011*

LEARNING POINTS

- **In Singapore, the reporting of workplace accidents and occupational diseases is a legal requirement under the Workplace Safety and Health (Incident Reporting) Regulations.**
 - **The reporting of occupational accidents and diseases allows investigations to be conducted to establish causality and active case finding to identify others who may also be at risk.**
 - **Early detection is important in the prevention of occupational disease as control measures can be instituted sooner for the protection of the affected worker as well as other workers.**
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