

Scaling new heights in workplace safety

This NEA-Industry scholar wants to help improve the working conditions of environmental services workers who clean up after us

Many cleaners work long hours on their feet across different sites in their day-to-day work. This is just one of the challenges that cleaners face.

"In Singapore, children are raised to have a negative view of the environmental services industry," says Ms Enrica Ng. "Parents would tell their kids to study hard or else they could 'end up as a road sweeper'."

The 20-year-old is one of the first scholars awarded the National Environment Agency (NEA)-Industry Scholarship when it was

first launched in February 2020. Through her work, she hopes to tackle the stigma faced by the workers who provide valuable services to the places we frequent: offices, factories, eateries and even our residences.

While many of her peers have pursued corporate careers in the comfort of air-conditioned offices, she has chosen a job that is unconventional but deeply meaningful to her.

As part of the NEA-Industry Scholarship, she currently works as a management associate in the Singapore branch of cleaning and facilities management company OCS Group.

A major part of her responsibilities revolves around developing processes to ensure that employees, including cleaners, are equipped to perform their duties safely.

Ms Ng believes her job places her in a good position to champion the causes of environmental services workers and improve their working conditions.

"Their supervisors may be constantly changing, or they may not have a proper escalation contact they can bring their concerns to," observes the scholar, who joined OCS Group in May 2023.

As part of an external inspection and auditing team, Ms Ng regularly carries the feedback of these workers to the relevant stakeholders so that action can be taken.

A typical workday for Ms Ng involves visiting three to four work sites, out of a total of around 350 sites managed by OCS Group. They include shopping malls, semiconductor factories and even condominiums.

"I go all around Singapore - one site could be at Gul Circle in Tuas and another in Changi," she says.

At each site, she takes note of safety concerns or any lapses and sometimes conducts safety training for employees.

Ms Ng likes that her job is far from being desk-bound. During her studies at Singapore Polytechnic (SP), she was part of the SP Adventurers, an outdoor activities club which revelled in rock-climbing, abseiling and kayaking. Now, her active work life suits her outdoorsy, adventurous personality.

"I enjoy walking around a lot and

having different views every day," says Ms Ng, who rock-climbs after work to unwind.

On top of that, she also finds her work purposeful.

"I talk to hundreds of staff and help to ensure that they have a safe, clean and conducive place to work and rest," she says.

Keeping workers safe

The importance of her work is clear to Ms Ng. "With safety inspections, audits and risk assessments, companies will be able to ensure that the staff are working in a proper manner and given adequate resources," she explains.

Ms Ng shares that part of her work includes checking if the work sites have chemical trays to prevent spillage, first-aid kits and other measures to keep the workplace safe for workers.

Another aspect of her work involves explaining to workers the importance of having safety protocols.

Her preferred method is to explain the reasoning behind the policy instead of being confrontational.

"Some people need more persistence, empathy and understanding to work out a consensus that will benefit them," says Ms Ng.

What you need to know about the NEA-Industry Scholarship

This scholarship is for young talents who are keen to build their careers in the environmental services industry.

After graduation, scholars are matched with companies in the industry and go through their respective hiring processes before securing a job with a suitable company.

Scholars will fulfil a bond period equal to the length of their study in their current course. Successful Institute of Technical Education (ITE) and polytechnic candidates receive an annual award of \$8,000 and \$15,000 respectively.

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place to work and rest."

Ms Enrica Ng
Recipient of the NEA-Industry Scholarship



Scan for more on the NEA-Industry Scholarship.



Having a role that is far from desk-bound appeals to Ms Enrica Ng, an avid rock-climber. PHOTO: SPH MEDIA