

Chapter 4

Safety and Health at Work



The Programme of Safety and Health at Work

www.labour.gov.hk/eng/osh/content.htm

- 4.1** The Occupational Safety and Health Branch is responsible for the promotion and regulation of safety and health at work. The objective of the Programme of Safety and Health at Work is to ensure that risks to people's safety and health at work are properly managed and reduced to the minimum through the three-pronged strategy of inspection and enforcement, education and training, as well as publicity and promotion. More specifically, we achieve the objective by:
- providing a legislative framework to safeguard safety and health at work;
 - ensuring compliance with the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance (OSHO), the Factories and Industrial Undertakings Ordinance (FIUO), the Boilers and Pressure Vessels Ordinance (BPVO) and their subsidiary regulations by conducting inspections and taking out regulatory actions;
 - investigating accidents and occupational health problems at workplaces;
 - providing to employers, employees and the general public appropriate information and advice to promote knowledge and understanding of occupational safety and health; and
 - organising promotional programmes and training courses to enhance safety awareness of the workforce.
- 4.2** The OSHO protects employees' safety and health at work generally in all branches of economic activities. It is a piece of enabling legislation that empowers the Commissioner for Labour to make regulations prescribing standards for general working environment as well as specific safety and health aspects at work.
- 4.3** The FIUO regulates safety and health at work in industrial undertakings, which include factories, construction sites, cargo and container handling areas, as well as catering establishments.
- 4.4** The BPVO aims at regulating the standards and operation of equipment such as boilers, pressure vessels, including thermal oil heaters, steam receivers, steam containers, air receivers and pressurised cement tanks mounted on trucks or trailers.



Our Work and Achievements in 2012

Work Safety Performance

4.5 Through the concerted efforts of all parties concerned, including employers, employees, contractors, safety practitioners, and the Government and public sector organisations, Hong Kong's work safety performance has been improving since 1998.

4.6 The number of occupational injuries in all workplaces in 2012 stood at 39 907, representing a drop of 5 per cent from 42 022 in 2003, while the injury rate per thousand employees decreased to 14.1, down by 20.2 per cent when compared to 17.7 in 2003. The number of industrial accidents for all sectors went down to 12 547, representing 27.3 per cent drop when compared to 17 249 in 2003. The accident rate per thousand workers for all sectors in 2003 and 2012 were 31.3 and 21.3* respectively.

**The compilation of the accident rate per 1 000 workers of all industrial sectors in 2012 is based on the employment size classified under Hong Kong Standard Industrial Classification Version 2.0 (HSIC V2.0) which is different from those under HSIC V1.1 before 2009. Therefore, this accident rate cannot be strictly comparable to those published before 2009.*

4.7 The number of industrial accidents in the construction industry decreased by 27.6 per cent, from 4 367 in 2003 to 3 160 in 2012, while the accident rate per thousand workers also decreased from 68.1 to 44.3, down by 34.9 per cent.

Occupational Diseases

4.8 In 2012, there were 280 cases of confirmed occupational disease, among which, occupational deafness, silicosis and tenosynovitis of the hand or forearm were the most common.

4.9 For more statistics on occupational safety and health, please visit the webpage: www.labour.gov.hk/eng/osh/content10.htm

Key Indicators of Work

4.10 Some key indicators of work of this programme area are shown in [Figure 4.1](#).

Inspection and Enforcement

- 4.11** To ensure safety and health at work, we inspect workplaces, monitor health hazards, investigate work accidents and occupational diseases, register and inspect boilers and pressure equipment and advise on measures to control hazards or prevent accidents.
- 4.12** A key element in enforcement is to give advice on the prevention of accidents. We conduct promotional visits to encourage employers to proactively adopt a self-regulatory approach in managing risks at the workplace. We also conducted regular enforcement inspections to various workplaces to ensure that duty-holders had observed relevant statutory requirements stipulated in safety legislation. In 2012, we conducted 12 special enforcement operations targeting high-risk work safety, including construction safety, safety of Repair, Maintenance, Alteration and Addition (RMAA) works, electrical safety, safety of waste treatment work, catering safety, logistic, cargo and container-handling safety as well as fire and chemical safety. Some of these special enforcement operations were conducted not only on normal working days but also at night and during holidays to clamp down on unsafe acts. In these 12 operations, a total of 22 059 workplaces were inspected, with 676 improvement notices and 300 suspension notices issued, and 836 prosecutions initiated.
- 4.13** We continued to place establishments with poor safety performance under close surveillance. Improvement notices or suspension notices were issued when necessary to secure a speedy rectification of irregularities, or to remove imminent risks to lives and limbs. Our Central Inspection Team conducts independent investigation into complaints lodged by workers and encouraged workers to report unsafe conditions or malpractices in workplaces. In 2012, the team handled 235 complaints and initiated 16 prosecutions arising from investigation of these cases. We also enhanced the intelligence reporting system on unsafe RMAA works with the Hong Kong Association of Property Management Companies. In 2012, a total of 384 enquiry/complaint/referral cases were received through the system and other channels. As a result of the follow-up inspections on these cases, we issued 85 suspension/improvement notices and took out 57 prosecutions. We had also established a similar referral mechanism with the Housing Department. In 2012, we received through the mechanism a total of 5 078 notifications of high risk RMAA works in public housing estates and followed up on these referrals.

4.14 From April to September, the department stepped up its enforcement, while enhancing publicity on prevention of heat stroke at work during the hot weather, targeting outdoor workplaces with a higher risk of heat stroke, such as construction sites, outdoor cleansing workplaces and container yards. In this special enforcement campaign, we conducted a total of 30 200 surprise inspections, in which 365 warnings and three improvement notices were issued. To prevent carbon monoxide poisoning accidents to kitchen workers, we also launched a special enforcement campaign targeting catering establishments, elderly homes and food factories, in which a total of 428 inspections were conducted, with 43 warnings, 15 improvement notices and one suspension notice issued, and five prosecutions taken out.

4.15 The Commissioner for Labour, as the Boilers and Pressure Vessels Authority, recognises competent inspection bodies to assess and inspect new pressure equipment during manufacturing. In addition, we conduct examinations, monitor courses for training of competent persons and issue certificates of competency to qualified candidates as competent persons for various types of boilers and steam receivers. In 2012, 380 applications for certificates of competency were processed, with 373 certificates issued/endorsed. We also advise the Fire Services Department on matters related to the approval and preliminary inspections of pressurised cylinders and storage installations for compressed gas.



An occupational hygienist using a smoke tube to test the ventilation system at a car park

4.16 As at the end of 2012, there were a total of 198 237 workplaces, including 27 958 construction sites, in Hong Kong. In the year, 128 821 inspections were conducted under the OSHO and the FIUO, while 4 769 inspections were made under the BPVO. As a result, 31 498 warnings were issued by Occupational Safety Officers while 3 237 warnings were given under the BPVO. Altogether, 2 403 suspension or improvement notices were issued. We also carried out 13 442 and 2 979 investigations on accidents and suspected occupational diseases respectively in the year.

Education and Training

4.17 We provide training-related services to employers, employees and relevant parties to foster a culture of respect for occupational safety and health among the working population. There are three categories of such services, namely provision of training courses, recognition of mandatory safety training (MST) courses and registration of safety officers and safety auditors.

4.18 In 2012, we conducted 450 safety and health training courses related to relevant legislation for 5 305 employees and 326 tailor-made talks for another 10 115. We also recognised four mandatory basic safety training courses (commonly known as “green card” courses) for construction work, one MST course for confined space operation and eight for loadshifting machinery operators. The Labour Department has in place a system to monitor these MST courses. This includes surprise inspections to ensure that courses are conducted in line with the approval conditions.

4.19 We continued to implement the three major improvement measures as concluded in the comprehensive review of the MST system in 2011, viz. consolidation of the guidance notes on running MST courses, standardisation of the essential course contents and centralised issuance of examination papers. Standardisation of course contents and enhancement of examination arrangement had been in place in the “green card” courses and would progressively be extended to other MST courses.

4.20 In 2012, we registered 231 persons as safety officers and 36 as safety auditors. As at the end of the year, there were 2 546 safety officers with valid registration and 1 094 registered safety auditors. Furthermore, a total of 227 applications for renewal or revalidation of registration as safety officers had been approved in 2012.

4.21 Occupational health education raises employers' and employees' awareness of the prevention of occupational health hazards and occupational diseases. In 2012, a total of 1 206 health talks on various occupational health issues was organised for over 39 000 participants. Apart from organising public health talks, we also provided outreaching health talks at the workplaces of individual organisations. These health talks covered more than 30 different topics including "Strategies for the Prevention of Occupational Diseases", "Manual Handling Operations and Prevention of Back Injuries", "Occupational Health for Cleansing Workers", "Prevention of Lower Limb Disorders" and "Occupational Health in Catering Industry".

4.22 The Labour Department has uploaded a "Work Safety Alert" on its website to help raise the safety awareness of employers, contractors and workers. The Alert summarises recent fatal and serious work accidents, and highlights general safety precautionary measures.



Occupational health talks delivered to bus captains

Publicity and Promotion

4.23 We organised a series of promotion campaigns in 2012 aiming at heightening safety awareness among employers and employees and cultivating a positive safety culture at the workplaces, some jointly with relevant stakeholders such as the Occupational Safety and Health Council (OSHC), trade associations, workers' unions and other government departments.

4.24 The Catering Industry Safety Award Scheme and the Construction Industry Safety Award Scheme were organised again in the year. The two schemes were well received by the industries.

4.25 Accidents in RMAA works have become a source of growing concern in recent years and the volume of RMAA works continued to increase. In 2012, the Labour Department, in collaboration with the OSHC, continued to implement the two year publicity campaign launched in 2010 to remind contractors and workers that safety comes first while carrying out RMAA works and working at height. Other major publicity activities included broadcasting Announcements in the Public Interest on television/radio/mobile media, staging roving exhibitions, publishing feature articles in newspapers and on the Labour Department website, publishing leaflets and disseminating safety messages to contractors, employers and employees through various means.



Catering Industry Safety Award Scheme - award presentation ceremony



Construction Industry Safety Award Scheme - award presentation ceremony

4.26 To improve the safety performance of construction industry, we organised a Construction Safety Forum in March 2012 in which representatives of trade associations, workers' unions and professional bodies as well as other participants shared their valuable views on how to enhance construction safety at different thematic workshops including "strengthening site management and supervision", "enhancing safety awareness and responsibilities of workers and supervisors", and "improving the safety management system". The Forum attracted over 700 participants, and the eight initiatives reached at the Forum are being implemented in phases.

4.27 The Labour Department continued to operate jointly with the OSHC various sponsorship schemes to encourage small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to use proper safety equipment. These included the Sponsorship Scheme for Work-at-height Fall Arresting Equipment for Renovation and Maintenance Work for SMEs, the Cut Resistant Gloves and Slip Resistant Shoes Sponsorship Scheme for Catering SMEs and the Reversing Video Device Sponsorship Scheme for Heavy Vehicles on Construction Sites.



4.28 The Labour Department and OSHC jointly launched a pilot scheme on RMAA safety accreditation in June 2012. The scheme enhances the OSH standard of the industry through the auditing of safety management system, training and subsidising SMEs to purchase fall arresting equipment and related facilities. The Employees' Compensation Insurance Residual Scheme Bureau undertook to offer insurance premium discount to accredited contractors, and thus provides financial incentives for enterprises to continuously improve their occupational safety performance.

- 4.29** The Occupational Safety Charter, launched jointly with the OSHC since 1996 to promote the spirit of “shared responsibility” in workplace safety and health, sets out a safety management framework for employers and employees to work together to create a safe and healthy working environment. By the end of 2012, 1 211 organisations, including public utilities companies, industrial and non-industrial establishments, banks, construction companies, unions, associations and community organisations, had subscribed to the Occupational Safety Charter.
- 4.30** We also collaborated with relevant organisations including the OSHC, Pneumoconiosis Compensation Fund Board, Occupational Deafness Compensation Board, employers’ associations, trade unions and community groups in promoting occupational health through a variety of activities such as carnivals, occupational health award ceremony, workplace hygiene charter and promotional visits. Moreover, we promoted the prevention of common work-related diseases, such as musculoskeletal disorders which are common among service and clerical personnel and manual workers. In 2012, we collaborated with the OSHC, Department of Health and trade unions to promote healthy living among professional drivers. The publicity activities included paying promotional visits to transport termini, distributing educational pamphlets and promotional souvenirs, and organising diet and exercise counselling services by professional dietitian and physical fitness instructor respectively.
- 4.31** We also stepped up publicity on the prevention of heat stroke at work through a multitude of activities such as organising public and outreaching health talks, distributing publications, printing promotional posters, broadcasting educational videos on mobile advertising media, and issuing press releases. In the year, apart from distributing the pamphlet “Prevention of Heat Stroke at Work in a Hot Environment” and promoting a general checklist on “Risk Assessment for the Prevention of Heat Stroke at Work”, we also collaborated with the OSHC and relevant workers’ unions to promote prevention of heat stroke at work among professional drivers.
- 4.32** Under the Customer Service Teams Project, volunteers visited 15 763 SMEs of food and beverage services, RMAA works, the retail trade and real estate maintenance management services to disseminate safety messages to employers and employees in the year.
- 4.33** In 2012, we published 25 new occupational safety and health publications, including safety of using truss-out bamboo scaffold, safety of using cleansing agents, electrical work safety, safety measures for using chemicals, safety measures for wearing and maintenance of respiratory protective equipment, and occupational safety and health statistics. We also produced publicity materials to promote the prevention of carbon monoxide poisoning accidents to kitchen workers. Moreover, we published publications in languages of ethnic minorities for promoting to them work safety and health.



Training course for Customer Service Teams Project

4.34 To promote safety awareness of the industry in operating boilers and pressure vessels, we distributed a total of 3 449 publications and leaflets regarding the safe operation of boilers and pressure vessels in 2012, reviewed and revised a number of publications, including "A Guide to the Construction, Installation, Operation and Maintenance of Air Receivers", "Code of Practice for Boiler and Pressure Vessels Owners", "Guide to Operation of Steam Receivers" and "Brief Accident Cases of Boilers and Pressure Vessels in Hong Kong". The "Operation Guide for Air Receivers" was also published in ethnic minority languages.



Latest publications on occupational safety and health



Occupational safety and health publications for ethnic minorities

4.35 In 2012, the Occupational Safety and Health Branch handled 14 003 enquiries, advising on various safety and health matters. Furthermore, the Occupational Safety and Health Centre provides information and advisory services to workers and employers.

Clinical Occupational Health Services

4.36 The Labour Department runs occupational health clinics in Kwun Tong and Fanling, providing clinical consultations, medical treatment as well as occupational health education and counselling services for workers suffering from work-related and occupational diseases. Workplaces of the patients are inspected if necessary to identify and evaluate occupational health hazards in the work environment.

4.37 In 2012, 13 007 clinical consultations were rendered. Moreover, five patient support groups were organised to help patients achieve more desirable rehabilitation progress through health talks, experience sharing and peer support.