

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** 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** 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** 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 2013

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 2013 stood at 38 027, representing a drop of 13.6 per cent from 44 025 in 2004, while the injury rate per thousand employees decreased to 13.2, down by 27.2 per cent when compared to 18.1 in 2004. The number of industrial accidents for all sectors went down to 11 820, representing 32.6 per cent drop when compared to 17 533 in 2004. The accident rate per thousand workers for all sectors in 2004 and 2013 were 31.5 and 19.6* respectively.

**The compilation of the accident rate per thousand workers of all industrial sectors in 2013 was based on the employment size classified under Hong Kong Standard Industrial Classification Version 2.0 (HSIC V2.0) which was 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 15.7 per cent, from 3 833 in 2004 to 3 232 in 2013, while the accident rate per thousand workers also decreased from 60.3 to 40.8, down by 32.5 per cent.

Occupational Diseases

- 4.8** In 2013, there were 198 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 were 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 and regular enforcement inspections to various workplaces to ensure that duty-holders have observed relevant statutory requirements stipulated in safety legislation. We not only conduct surprise inspections on normal working days but also at night and during holidays to clamp down on unsafe acts. In 2013, 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. In 2013, we also conducted 14 special enforcement operations targeting high-risk work safety, including new works safety, safety of RMAA works, electrical safety, safety of waste treatment work, catering safety, logistic, cargo and container-handling safety as well as fire and chemical safety. In these 14 operations, a total of 21 621 workplaces were inspected, with 854 improvement notices and 394 suspension notices issued, and 905 prosecutions initiated.
- 4.13** We conduct independent investigation into complaints lodged by workers on unsafe conditions or malpractices in workplaces. In 2013, we handled 156 complaints and initiated 10 prosecutions arising from investigation of these cases. We also enhanced the intelligence reporting system on unsafe RMAA works with various strategic partners. In 2013, a total of 643 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 91 suspension/improvement notices and took out 61 prosecutions. We had also established a similar referral mechanism with the Housing Department. In 2013, we received through the mechanism a total of 5 313 notifications of high risk RMAA works in public housing estates and followed up on these referrals.

4.14 From April to September, the Labour Department (LD) 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 30 646 surprise inspections, and issued 219 warnings and one improvement notice.



An occupational hygienist measuring air contaminants and the heat stress level in a tunneling work site

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 2013, 446 applications for certificates of competency were processed, with 424 certificates issued/endorsed. We also advised the Fire Services Department on matters related to the approval and preliminary inspections of pressurised cylinders and storage installations for compressed gas.

4.16 As at the end of 2013, there were a total of 204 444 workplaces, including 30 771 construction sites, in Hong Kong. In the year, 123 115 inspections were conducted under OSHO and FIUO, while 4 761 inspections were made under BPVO. As a result, 30 496 warnings were issued by Occupational Safety Officers while 3 723 warnings were given under BPVO. Altogether, 2 526 suspension or improvement notices were issued. We also carried out 13 266 and 2 884 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 2013, we conducted 470 safety and health training courses related to relevant legislation for 5 510 employees and 331 tailor-made talks for another 11 762. We also recognised six mandatory basic safety training courses (commonly known as “green card” courses) for construction work, two MST courses for crane operators and nine for loadshifting machinery operators. LD 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 2013, we registered 296 persons as safety officers and 43 as safety auditors. As at the end of the year, there were 2 846 safety officers with valid registration and 1 137 registered safety auditors. Furthermore, a total of 244 applications for renewal or revalidation of registration as safety officers had been approved in 2013.

4.21 Occupational health education raises employers' and employees' awareness of the prevention of occupational health hazards and occupational diseases. In 2013, a total of 1 099 health talks on various occupational health issues was organised for over 36 000 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 "Occupational Health for Office Workers", "Manual Handling Operations and Prevention of Back Injuries", "Occupational Health for Workers of Residential Care Home for the Elderly", "Prevention of Lower Limb Disorders" and "Occupational Health in Catering Industry".



Large-scale health talks organised by the Labour Department well-received by employers and employees

4.22 LD had uploaded a "Work Safety Alert" on its website to help raise the safety awareness of employers, contractors and workers. The Alert summarised recent fatal and serious work accidents, and highlighted general safety precautionary measures.

Publicity and Promotion

4.23 We organised a series of promotion campaigns in 2013 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.



Catering Industry Safety Award Scheme - Award Presentation Ceremony



Construction Industry Safety Award Scheme - Award Presentation Ceremony

- 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 2013, LD, in collaboration with OSHC, continued to implement the two-year publicity campaign launched in 2012 to remind contractors and workers that safety came first while carrying out RMAA works, electrical work 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 LD website, publishing leaflets and disseminating safety messages to contractors, employers and employees through various means.
- 4.26** To improve the safety performance of construction industry, we organised a Work-at-Height Safety Forum in April 2013 in which representatives of trade associations, workers' unions and professional bodies as well as other participants shared their valuable views on how to enhance work-at-height safety. The Forum attracted over 550 participants. Besides, LD and OSHC jointly launched a mobile working platform sponsorship scheme for small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) to enhance the OSH standard of the industry. As at end of 2013, over 1 000 applications were received with 820 approved, benefiting over 9 700 workers.
- 4.27** LD continued to operate jointly with OSHC various sponsorship schemes to encourage 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 and the Reversing Video Device Sponsorship Scheme for Heavy Vehicles on Construction Sites.
- 4.28** LD and OSHC continued the scheme on RMAA safety accreditation in 2013. It 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 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 2013, 1 215 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 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 2013, we continued to collaborate with 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 OSHC and relevant workers' unions to promote prevention of heat stroke at work among professional drivers.
- 4.32** We organized a large scale seminar, jointly with OSHC, professional bodies, other major stakeholders and associations in the trade, for sharing the professional knowledge and experience on safety and inspections of boilers and pressure vessels. We also delivered three safety talks to several organisations in the industry in the year.

4.33 In 2013, we published 26 new occupational safety and health publications, including “A Casebook of Fatal Accidents Related to Work-at-Height”, “Noise at Work”, “Checklist for Risk Assessment of Outdoor Work under High Air Pollution Levels”, “Decompression Illness”, “Guidelines for Employers and Employees – Prevention of Avian Influenza” and “Occupational Safety and Health Statistics”. Moreover, we published publications in languages of ethnic minorities for promoting to them work safety and health.



Latest publications on occupational safety and health



Occupational safety and health publications for ethnic minorities

- 4.34** To promote safety awareness of the industry in operating boilers and pressure vessels, we distributed a total of 3 064 publications and leaflets regarding the safe operation of boilers and pressure vessels in 2013 and reviewed two publications, including “Electric Boiler Operator Guide” and “A Guide for Fire Tube Boiler Operation”.
- 4.35** In 2013, the Occupational Safety and Health Branch handled 13 889 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** LD 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 2013, 11 855 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.