

# Chapter 4

## Safety and Health at Work

### The Programme of Safety and Health at Work

[www.labour.gov.hk/eng/osh/content.htm](http://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 legislation 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 improve safety awareness of the workforce.
- 4.2** The Labour Department establishes the legislative framework to safeguard safety and health at work. The principal legislation for safety and health at work includes the OSHO, the FIUO, and the BPVO.
- 4.3** With few exceptions, the OSHO protects employees' safety and health at work in practically 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.

- 4.4** 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.
- 4.5** 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 2011

### Work Safety Performance

- 4.6** 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.
- 4.7** The number of occupational injuries in all workplaces in 2011 stood at 40 578, representing a drop of 13.7 per cent from 47 023 in 2002, while the injury rate per thousand employees decreased to 14.6, down by 24.1 per cent when compared to 19.2 in 2002. The number of industrial accidents for all sectors went down to 13 658, representing 39.2 per cent drop when compared to 22 453 in 2002. The accident rate per thousand workers for all sectors in 2002 and 2011 were 37.4 and 23.6\* respectively.

*\*The compilation of the accident rate per 1 000 workers of all industrial sectors in 2011 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.*

- 4.8** The number of industrial accidents in the construction industry decreased significantly by 50.1 per cent, from 6 239 in 2002 to 3 112 in 2011, while the accident rate per thousand workers also decreased from 85.2 to 49.7, down by 41.7 per cent.

## Occupational Diseases

- 4.9** In 2011, there were 353 cases of confirmed occupational disease, among which, occupational deafness, silicosis and tenosynovitis of the hand or forearm were the most common.
- 4.10** For more statistics on occupational safety and health, please visit the webpage: [www.labour.gov.hk/eng/osh/content10.htm](http://www.labour.gov.hk/eng/osh/content10.htm)

## Key Indicators of Work

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

## Enforcement

- 4.12** 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.
- 4.13** 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 all related statutory requirements stipulated in safety legislation. In 2011, we conducted 15 special enforcement operations targeting various high-risk work activities, including construction safety, safety of Repair, Maintenance, Alteration and Addition (RMAA) works, work safety of temporary platforms/gangways on construction sites, electrical safety, safety of waste recycling work, safety of cleansing work, catering safety, 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 detect and clamp down on unsafe acts. In these 15 operations, a total of 23 426 workplaces were inspected, with 527 improvement notices and 171 suspension notices issued, and 560 prosecutions initiated.

- 4.14** 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. To handle workers' complaints on work safety more effectively, our Central Inspection Team conducts independent investigation into complaints lodged by workers and encouraged workers to report unsafe conditions or malpractices in workplaces. In 2011, the team handled 199 complaints and initiated nine 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 2011, a total of 319 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 56 suspension/improvement notices and took out 33 prosecutions. We had also established a similar referral mechanism with the Housing Department. In 2011, we received through the mechanism a total of 2 961 notifications of high risk RMAA works in public housing estates and followed up on these referrals.
- 4.15** 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, to ensure adequate protection of workers from heat stroke at work. In this special enforcement campaign, we conducted a total of 28 900 surprise inspections, in which 437 warnings and 14 improvement notices were issued and 7 prosecutions taken out. To safeguard the occupational safety and health of cleansing workers, we also launched special enforcement campaigns targeting cleansing workplaces, in which a total of 325 inspections were conducted, with 146 warnings and six improvement notices issued, and four prosecutions taken out.
- 4.16** The Commissioner for Labour, as the Boilers and Pressure Vessels Authority, recognises competent inspection bodies to assess and inspect new pressure equipment during manufacturing. As at the end of 2011, there were 29 appointed examiners and seven recognised inspection bodies. 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 2011, 380 applications for certificates of competency were processed, with 366 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.

**4.17** As at the end of 2011, there were a total of 192 435 workplaces, including 25 605 construction sites, in Hong Kong. In the year, 118 694 inspections were conducted under the OSHO and the FIUO, while 4 719 inspections were made under the BPVO. As a result, 30 537 warnings were issued by Occupational Safety Officers while 3 134 warnings were given under the BPVO. Altogether, 1 707 suspension or improvement notices were issued. We also carried out 11 859 and 2 998 investigations on accidents and suspected occupational diseases respectively in the year.



An inspecting officer of the Labour Department monitoring the air impurity level in a laboratory to protect employees' health

## Education and Training

**4.18** 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.

- 4.19** In 2011, we conducted 504 safety and health training courses related to relevant legislation for 4 742 employees and 319 tailor-made talks for another 9 757. We also recognised seven mandatory basic safety training courses (commonly known as “green card” courses) for construction and container-handling work, 10 MST courses for confined space operation, two for gas welding, seven for crane operators and nine for loadshifting machinery operators. The Labour Department has in place a system to monitor these MST courses to ensure their standard. This includes surprise inspections to ensure that courses are conducted in line with the approval conditions. In February, the Commissioner for Labour withdrew the recognition of three safety training courses granted to a course provider for having violated the conditions imposed for running the three courses concerned.
- 4.20** To enhance the system for recognition and monitoring of MST courses, the Labour Department conducted a comprehensive review of the system with a view to recommending improvement measures. The review was concluded in 2011 and the recommendations were generally supported by the Legislative Council Panel on Manpower and related parties. Three major improvement measures, viz. consolidation of the guidance notes on running MST courses, standardisation of the essential course contents and centralised issuance of examination papers, were rolled out in September. Standardisation of course contents and enhancement of examination arrangement started with the “green card” courses and would progressively be extended to other MST courses.
- 4.21** In 2011, we registered 194 persons as safety officers and 55 as safety auditors. As at the end of the year, there were 2 318 safety officers with valid registration and 1 058 registered safety auditors. Furthermore, a total of 279 applications for renewal and revalidation of registration as safety officers had been approved in 2011.

**4.22** Occupational health education raises employers' and employees' awareness of the prevention of occupational health hazards and occupational diseases. In 2011, a total of 1 272 health talks on various occupational health issues was organised for over 38 000 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".



**4.23** 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.

## Publicity and Promotion

- 4.24** We organised a series of promotion campaigns in 2011 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.
- 4.25** 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.
- 4.26** Accidents in RMAA works have become a source of growing concern in recent years and the volume of RMAA works continued to increase. In 2011, 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.
- 4.27** We also partnered with the OSHC, District Councils, District Offices, Safe and Healthy Communities in various districts and the property management sector to organise publicity and promotional activities to promulgate work-at-height and RMAA works safety at district level, including organising safety seminars to promote awareness in the property management sector and property owners. Such publicity and promotional activities have already been launched in 17 districts.



**4.28** 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.

**4.29** 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 2011, 1 139 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.



Occupational Safety Charter Signing Ceremony

**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 presentations, workplace hygiene charter and promotional visits. With a view to further safeguarding the health of workers, apart from publicising the prevention of occupational diseases, we also promoted the prevention of common work-related diseases, such as musculoskeletal disorders which are common among service and clerical personnel and manual workers. In 2011, we also collaborated with the OSHC, employers' associations and trade unions of the retail and catering industries to promote measures for preventing leg diseases like varicose veins and plantar fasciitis among workers of the two industries. The publicity activities included showing promotional videos on mobile advertising media, paying promotional visits to retail stores and restaurants by occupational safety and health ambassadors, distributing educational pamphlets and promotional souvenirs, and inviting the Hong Kong Podiatrists Association and Physical Fitness Association of Hong Kong to design a set of workplace exercises specifically for workers of the two industries, which was promoted through seminars and exercise workshops.

**4.31** Moreover, 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 to remind employers and employees of the need for due care when working in the hot weather. 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.



Outreaching health talks on prevention of heat stroke at work

**4.32** Under the Customer Service Teams Project, volunteers visited 17 949 SMEs of food and beverage services, RMAA works, the retail trade and pest control and cleaning services to disseminate safety messages to employers and employees in the year.



Customer Service Teams Project 2011

**4.33** In 2011, we published 14 new occupational safety and health publications, including “Safety Hints for Heavy Vehicles Tyre Demounting and Inflation Work”, poster on “Working at height Safety comes first”, leaflets to promote the proper use of respirators, “Occupational Safety and Health Statistics Bulletin Issue No. 11 (July 2011)”, and booklets and leaflets for promoting health at work, e.g. “Health Guide for Working during the Cold Weather” and “Guide on Prevention of Health Hazards of Prolonged Standing for the Catering Industry”. 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 organised a large-scale seminar jointly with OSHC, professional bodies, other major stakeholders and associations in the trade to enable the sharing of professional knowledge and experience on topics related to safety and quality management. We also distributed a total of 2 680 publications and leaflets regarding the safe operation of boilers and pressure vessels, with one of the publications “Guide to Operation of Steam Receivers” reviewed and revised in 2011.



The Commissioner for Labour Mr. Cheuk Wing Hing officiates at the 22nd Boilers and Pressure Vessels Safety Seminar jointly organised by the Boilers and Pressure Vessels Division and the Occupational Safety & Health Council

**4.35** In 2011, the Occupational Safety and Health Branch handled 13 098 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.



Fanling Occupational Health Clinic

**4.37** In 2011, 13 236 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.