

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 2014

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 2014 stood at 37 523, representing a drop of 15.2 per cent from 44 267 in 2005, while the injury rate per thousand employees decreased to 12.8, down by 28.3 per cent when compared to 17.8 in 2005. The number of industrial accidents for all sectors went down to 11 677, representing 31 per cent drop when compared to 16 917 in 2005. The accident rate per thousand workers for all sectors in 2005 and 2014 were 30.6 and 19* respectively.

*The compilation of the accident rate per thousand workers of all industrial sectors in 2014 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 2.3 per cent, from 3 548 in 2005 to 3 467 in 2014, while the accident rate per thousand workers also decreased from 59.9 to 41.9, down by 30.1 per cent.

Occupational Diseases

- 4.8** In 2014, there were 243 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 have stepped up inspection and enforcement efforts to clamp down on unsafe acts. In 2014, 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 2014, we also conducted 17 special enforcement operations targeting high-risk work safety, including new works safety, safety of repair, maintenance, alteration, and addition (RMAA) works, electrical safety, tunneling works safety, lifting operations safety, falsework safety, work safety for sea-based construction works, safety of waste treatment work, catering safety, logistic, cargo and container-handling safety as well as fire and chemical safety. In these 17 operations, a total of 14 002 workplaces were inspected, with 920 improvement notices and 512 suspension notices issued, and 933 prosecutions initiated.

4.13 We conduct independent investigation into complaints lodged by workers on unsafe conditions or malpractices in workplaces. In 2014, we handled 136 complaints and initiated eight prosecutions arising from investigation of these cases. We also enhanced the intelligence reporting system on unsafe RMAA works with various strategic partners. In 2014, a total of 1 142 complaint/referral cases were received through the system and other channels. As a result of the follow-up inspections on these cases, we issued 117 suspension/improvement notices and took out 116 prosecutions. We had also established a similar referral mechanism with the Housing Department. In 2014, we received through the mechanism a total of 10 483 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 30 036 surprise inspections, and issued 106 warnings and two improvement notices.
- 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 2014, 443 applications for certificates of competency were processed, with 421 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 2014, there were a total of 211 298 workplaces, including 32 094 construction sites, in Hong Kong. In the year, 124 907 inspections were conducted under OSHO and FIUO, while 4 762 inspections were made under BPVO. As a result, 30 961 warnings were issued by Occupational Safety Officers while 3 197 warnings were given under BPVO. Altogether, 3 011 suspension or improvement notices were issued. We also carried out 14 758 and 3 093 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 2014, we conducted 515 safety and health training courses related to relevant legislation for 6 880 employees and 285 tailor-made talks for another 11 633. We also recognised nine mandatory basic safety training courses (commonly known as "green card" courses) for construction work, six MST courses for operators of cranes, one MST course for confined spaces operation and four MST courses for operators of loadshifting machinists. 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 of the MST system, 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 2014, we registered 329 persons as safety officers and 44 as safety auditors. As at the end of the year, there were 2 977 safety officers with valid registration and 1 181 registered safety auditors. Furthermore, a total of 1 241 applications for renewal or revalidation of registration as safety officers had been approved in 2014.
- 4.21** Occupational health education raises employers’ and employees’ awareness of the prevention of occupational health hazards and occupational diseases. In 2014, a total of 1 204 health talks on various occupational health issues was organised for over 40 000 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 were well-received by employers and employees

4.22 LD had uploaded the “Work Safety Alert” and “Systemic Safety Alert” on its website respectively to help raise the safety awareness of employers, contractors and workers and to remind the Registered Safety Officers and Registered Safety Auditors in exercising their statutory functions to advise their employers/clients to fulfill their safety responsibilities and render the necessary assistance. The Work Safety Alert summarised recent fatal and serious work accidents, and highlighted general safety precautionary measures whereas the Systemic Safety Alert provided accident prevention measures arising from the major systemic problems.

Publicity and Promotion

4.23 We organised a series of promotion campaigns in 2014 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 2014, LD, in collaboration with OSHC, launched the two-year publicity campaign to remind contractors and workers to pay special attention to safety while carrying out RMAA works, electrical work and working at height. Other major publicity activities included broadcasting Announcements in the Public Interest (APIs) 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. We produced a new Radio API and a TV API on unsafe use of ladder for broadcast in 2014.
- 4.26** To improve the safety performance of construction industry, we organised a RMAA Safety Conference in February 2014 and a series of thematic safety seminars including mobile crane operation, tunneling works, working-at-height and electrical work to engage industry stakeholders in exploring means to further enhance the construction safety standard of the industry players. 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 in 2013. As at end of 2014, over 1 700 applications were received with 1 582 approved, benefiting over 17 000 workers.
- 4.27** LD continued to operate jointly with OSHC the sponsorship scheme for Work-at-height Fall Arresting Equipment for Renovation and Maintenance Work for SMEs to encourage them to use proper safety equipment.

4.28 LD and OSHC continued the scheme on RMAA safety accreditation in 2014. 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 2014, 1 222 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 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 2014, 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 In 2014, we published 14 new occupational safety and health publications, including "Do You Know Tenosynovitis?", "Prevention of Heat Stroke at Work in a Hot Environment", "Occupational Safety and Health Statistics" and posters related to safe lifting operations. 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

- 4.33** To promote safety awareness of the industry in operating boilers and pressure vessels, we distributed a total of 1 397 publications and leaflets regarding the safe operation of boilers and pressure vessels in 2014.
- 4.34** In 2014, the Occupational Safety and Health Branch handled 13 746 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

- 4.35** 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.
- 4.36** In 2014, 10 396 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.