

# Collective effort needed to enhance workplace safety

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An inspector (center) from the Ministry of Manpower conducting a site inspection along Jalan Ampas in 2015. PHOTO: ST FILE

The Ministry of Manpower (MOM) shares the concerns of Forum writers over the recent workplace fatalities ("Promote safe working practices on the ground" by Mr Paul Chan Poh Hoi and "Communication, enforcement key to ensuring workplace safety" by Mr Lim Boon Khoo; both published last Friday, and "Multipronged approach needed to stem workplace deaths" by Mr Lim Ming Yen; June 4).

We agree it is important to share information on workplace accidents promptly so that lessons can be learnt and measures taken to prevent similar accidents.

A thorough investigation is required to establish how an accident occurred and its root causes. This takes time and is necessary so that correct lessons are drawn.

Nonetheless, MOM has been working with the Workplace Safety and Health (WSH) Council to release preliminary information on every fatality within seven days of occurrence through the WSH Alert Accident Notifications.

A multipronged approach is indeed needed to improve WSH. The Workplace Safety and Health Act introduced in 2006 takes an outcome-based approach.

It is impossible and, in fact, counterproductive for the authorities to prescribe safety measures for every work situation. Instead, the WSH Act places the responsibility of ensuring the safety and health of workers on those that create the risk in the workplace. Hence, it is an employer's primary responsibility to take reasonably practicable measures to protect their workers.

The WSH Council has capability-building programmes to help employers fulfil this responsibility. For example, the bizSAFE programme, with over 24,500 members, is a five-step programme to help companies begin their journey to improve WSH.

The CultureSAFE programme helps companies build and sustain a progressive and pervasive WSH culture. Companies can also sign up for the Safety Compliance Assistance Visit Plus to engage certified WSH professionals to identify safety lapses at their workplaces and recommend control measures.

These efforts are complemented by an equal focus on safety training. All workers in the construction industry must attend and pass the Safety Orientation Course for Construction Industry. WSH coordinators and supervisors have to undergo rigorous training and be certified.

We have also stepped up awareness efforts by distributing visual pictograms indicating the dos and don'ts of common work situations to reinforce the safety consciousness of workers.

These capability-building and training initiatives are backed by a risk-based and calibrated enforcement regime. Over 3,000 inspections targeting high-risk sectors, focusing on specific work activities with high injury incidences, have been conducted this year. We have also introduced stiffer penalties to increase deterrence.

Everyone has a role in preventing injuries. We call on the support of concerned stakeholders to work with us.

## **Ho Siong Hin**

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Ministry of Manpower

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