

SCED reaffirms Hong Kong's support for free trade and multilateral trading system on US visit (with photos)

Hong Kong vigorously pursues a free trade policy and firmly believes in multilateral trading system, the Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Mr Edward Yau, said at a luncheon today (June 12, Eastern Standard Time) during his duty visit to Washington, DC, the United States (US), citing that Hong Kong, despite its small size, has been the seventh largest merchandise trading entity in the world.

The luncheon was co-organised by the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office, Washington, DC and the Brookings Institution. Mr Yau shared his insights on the state of free trade from Hong Kong's perspective with about 60 US business and academic leaders.

Noting the emergence of trade tensions and protectionist sentiments around the world, Mr Yau said, "This is indeed a testing time, as the free trade philosophy that many economies subscribe to comes into doubt. We have been actively engaging our trading partners at the World Trade Organization (WTO) and elsewhere to convey our concerns."

"As a free trade practitioner and staunch supporter of the multilateral trading system, we believe that disputes are best dealt with through negotiations and the WTO rather than unilaterally," Mr Yau said, adding that the success of this system is supported by evidence, as world trade volumes in 2017 were roughly 40 times the level recorded in the early days of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.

He said that Hong Kong has taken a multi-pronged approach to diversify its economy and broaden its consumer market catchment, in large part by reinforcing partnerships. Hong Kong and like-minded economies are pressing ahead to forge alliances through the signing of free trade agreements (FTAs). In this regard, the latest addition to Hong Kong's FTA portfolio is a high quality and comprehensive in scope FTA, and an investment agreement with Australia signed in March.

In addition to joining the luncheon, Mr Yau called on the Deputy Chief of Mission and Minister of the Chinese Embassy in the US, Mr Li Kexin.

Mr Yau will depart the US for Hong Kong tomorrow (June 13, Eastern Standard Time). The Under Secretary for Commerce and Economic Development, Dr Bernard Chan, will, in the place of Mr Yau, lead the business and professional mission to visit Dubai, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on June 16 and 17.



Make prior work arrangements for rainstorms

The Labour Department (LD) today (June 13) reminded employers to make prior work arrangements for staff during and after rainstorms.

"To avoid disputes and confusion, employers should make prior work arrangements for staff and contingency measures during and after rainstorms," an LD spokesman said.

"In working out and enforcing the arrangements, employers should give prime consideration to employees' safety both in the workplace and during their journeys to and from work, and adopt a flexible approach. Whenever possible, they should consult their staff."

The work arrangements should cover the following matters:

- * Whether employees are required to report for duty when different rainstorm warnings are issued;
- * How wages and allowances will be calculated for staff who are required to report for duty, as well as those who are late for work or absent from work during rainstorms;
- * For employees who are required to travel to and from workplaces during rainstorms, whether transport facilities will be provided for them and, if so, the arrangements; and
- * The time for staff who have not reported for duty to resume work after a rainstorm warning is cancelled, and other relevant arrangements as well as contingency measures.

"Employers should make realistic assessments of the requirements for staff and require only absolutely essential staff to report for duty in adverse weather conditions. If an Amber, Red or Black Rainstorm Warning is issued during working hours, employees working indoors should remain on duty as usual and stay where they are unless it is dangerous to do so. Supervisors of employees working outdoors in exposed areas should suspend outdoor duties as soon as practicable. They should arrange for their employees to take shelter temporarily and resume duty when weather conditions permit. When the Black Rainstorm Warning is issued, those employees should not resume duty until the warning is lowered and weather conditions permit. If the Black Rainstorm Warning remains in force at the end of working hours, for safety reasons, employers should provide employees with an area in the workplace as temporary shelter for them to stay if they want to.

"If possible, employers should provide transport services for employees who are still required to travel to and from workplaces when the Black Rainstorm Warning is in force, or give them a special travelling allowance as encouragement.

"For staff who have practical difficulties in resuming work on time upon cancellation of a rainstorm warning, employers should give due consideration to the circumstances of individual employees and handle each case flexibly.

"As rainstorms are natural occurrences that cannot be avoided, employers should not deduct wages of employees who are absent from or late for work because of inclement weather. Neither should employers dismiss an employee summarily based on these grounds," he said.

The spokesman also reminded employers to observe the statutory liabilities and requirements under the Employment Ordinance, the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance, the Employees' Compensation Ordinance and the Minimum Wage Ordinance.

Employers should not deduct the annual leave, statutory holidays or rest days employees are entitled to under the Employment Ordinance so as to compensate for the loss of working hours resulting from employees' failure to report for duty upon the announcement of a Black Rainstorm Warning. An employer who without reasonable excuse fails to comply with relevant provisions under the Employment Ordinance is liable to prosecution.

Employers should also note that they have an obligation to maintain a safe workplace for their employees under the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance.

"If employees are required to work in times of rainstorms, employers should ensure that the risks at work are properly controlled and reduced to levels that are as low as reasonably practicable," the spokesman said.

Under the Employees' Compensation Ordinance, employers are liable to pay compensation for deaths or injury incurred when employees are travelling by a

direct route from their residence to their workplace, or from their workplace back to their residence after work, four hours before or after working hours on a day when Typhoon Signal No. 8 or above or a Red or Black Rainstorm Warning is in force.

To provide practical guidelines and samples of work arrangements for the reference of employers and employees, the LD has issued the booklet "Code of Practice in times of Typhoons and Rainstorms". The booklet can be obtained from branch offices of the Labour Relations Division or downloaded from the department's webpage (www.labour.gov.hk/eng/public/wcp/Rainstorm.pdf).

Employers, contractors and employees should be aware of electrical safety at work during rainstorm

As the rainstorm warning has been issued by the Hong Kong Observatory, the Labour Department (LD) reminds employers and contractors that they should adopt necessary work arrangements and take suitable safety measures to protect the safety of their employees when they are carrying out electrical work or handling electrical plant.

A spokesman for the LD said today (June 13) that employers and contractors should avoid assigning employees to carry out electrical work (like electric arc welding work) or handle electrical plant at places affected by rainstorms, and should refer to the "Code of Practice in times of Typhoons and Rainstorms" and the "Guide on Safety at Work in times of Inclement Weather" issued by the LD.

Even if electrical work is carried out or electrical plant is handled at places not affected by the rainstorm, suitable safety measures must still be adopted to prevent electric shock as the air would be more humid. Such measures include:

- (i) Ensure that all live parts of an electrical installation are isolated from the power supply source and rendered dead, and the isolation from the power supply source must be maintained as long as electrical work is being carried out;
- (ii) Before carrying out any electrical work or handling any electrical plant, cut off and lock out the power supply source, then test the circuit concerned to confirm it is dead and display suitable warning notices, and issue a work permit thereafter;
- (iii) Ensure that protective devices (such as suitable and adequate fuses and circuit breakers) for the electrical installations or electrical plant have

been installed and maintained in good working order, and portable electric tools must be double-insulated or properly earthed;

(iv) Provide suitable personal protective equipment such as insulating gloves and insulating mats for employees; and

(v) If live electrical work is unavoidable, a comprehensive risk assessment should be conducted by a competent person and the appropriate safety precautions should be taken to remove or properly control the electrical hazards involved before such work can proceed.

In addition, employees should co-operate with the employer or contractor to follow the safety instructions and use the safety equipment provided.

The LD has published guidebooks and leaflets on electrical work safety. These safety publications are available free from divisional offices of the department or can be downloaded from its website (www.labour.gov.hk/eng/public/content2_8.htm).

Should there be any questions about occupational safety and health matters, please contact the Occupational Safety Officer of the LD at 2559 2297.

Public urged to report flooding

Attention duty announcers, radio and TV stations:

Please broadcast the following as soon as possible and repeat it at suitable intervals:

Members of the public are advised to report any street flooding that comes to their notice to the Drainage Services Department by calling the 24-hour drainage hotline on 2300 1110.

Suspension of counter services at Hong Kong Licensing Office

The Transport Department (TD) announced this morning (June 13) that owing to the situation in Admiralty, the counter services for vehicle registration and other licensing and permit applications at the TD's Hong Kong Licensing Office will be suspended until further notice.

Members of the public are advised to go to Kowloon, Kwun Tong and Sha Tin Licensing Offices for counter services for vehicle licence and driving licence applications, and submission of applications under ex-gratia payment scheme. They may also place their applications into the drop boxes at all licensing offices or send the applications to the TD by post.

â€‹ For other services, members of the public can visit the following relevant licensing offices:

- Sha Tin Licensing Office: vehicle first registration,
- Kowloon Licensing Office: direct issue of full Hong Kong driving licence, passenger service licence and other licensing services for public vehicles, Hire Car Permit and Lantau Close Road Permit

For enquiries, please call 2150 7728.