

Labour Department highly concerned about recent occurrence of number of fatal industrial accidents

The Labour Department (LD) is highly concerned about the recent spate of fatal industrial accidents in the construction industry. The LD is saddened by the death of workers and expresses its deepest sympathy to the victims' families.

A spokesman for the LD today (November 29) said, "The fatal industrial accidents that happened recently in the construction industry all involved suspected failure of duty holders in properly assessing the work hazards and fully implementing the corresponding safety measures. It is suspected that safety measures related to work in confined spaces were not fully implemented during maintenance work in a sewer manhole, thus causing death and injury of workers. It is also suspected that poor housekeeping of a demolition site caused construction debris to catch fire during flame cutting work. A worker is suspected to have failed to take appropriate fall preventive measures and eventually fell from height while erecting a truss-out scaffold (TOS) at the external wall of a building."

The spokesman added, "These fatal industrial accidents were all avoidable. If the contractors and employers had properly assessed the work hazards before work commencement, formulated safe work methods and adopted necessary safety measures and procedures, the three precious lives could have been saved. The LD appeals to employers and employees not to let their guard down, neglect work risks or disregard work safety for the sake of convenience. Failure to take necessary safety measures while at work can lead to serious consequences."

As regards the above-mentioned construction work activities, the LD has issued Codes of Practice and guidelines, illustrating the possible work risks and the necessary precautionary measures for reference by the industry in safeguarding workers' safety. In addition, in light of the dry weather lately, the LD also appeals to contractors, employers and workers to take extra fire safety precautions to avoid outbreaks of fire.

In light of the recent spate of serious industrial accidents, the LD will step up its enforcement efforts. Apart from regular surprise inspections, the LD will conduct targeted special enforcement operations, including one targeting work in confined spaces for sewerage treatment works. During the operation, the LD will take vigorous enforcement action pursuant to the law if any violation of the occupational safety and health (OSH) legislation is detected, including issuing suspension notices where necessary to suspend the relevant work process and taking out prosecutions. In addition, the LD will also step up inspections of other construction sites, including those involving TOS works, and will take action pursuant to the law in case violation of OSH legislation is detected during inspections.

Under the general duty provisions of the Factories and Industrial Undertakings Ordinance, contractors and employers are required to provide safe systems of work, plant and working environment for their employees. Employees should also co-operate with their employers, adopt all safety measures and properly use personal protective equipment provided, to avoid endangering their own work safety and that of other workers. Contractors and employers who contravene the above requirements are liable to a maximum fine of \$500,000 and imprisonment for six months. Employees who contravene the related requirements are liable to a maximum fine of \$50,000 and imprisonment for six months.

The LD will complete investigations on the above-mentioned accidents as soon as possible to identify the causes of the accidents and ascertain the liability of the duty holders. The department will take action pursuant to the law if there is any violation of the work safety legislation.