

Labour Department strengthens inspection to ensure adequate measures taken by employers to protect employees from heat stroke

As the weather has been very hot recently, the Labour Department (LD) is highly concerned about the risk of heat stroke among employees (especially those engaged in outdoor work) and has stepped up relevant inspection and enforcement action to protect employees' occupational health.

A spokesman for the LD said, "The LD conducts inspections every summer targeting industries (such as construction, cleaning, security and horticulture industries) with a higher risk of heat stroke. The purpose is to ensure that employers have conducted risk assessments on heat stress in accordance with the guideline issued by the LD and have taken appropriate occupational safety and health (OSH) measures. The LD has already commenced large-scale inspections this summer."

According to the general duty provisions of the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance (Cap. 509), employers must provide their employees with a work environment and system of work that is safe and without risks to health. To this end, employers have to conduct risk assessments on heat stress at work and take appropriate OSH measures to protect employees from heat stroke at work.

In order to assist employers in conducting risk assessment on heat stress, the LD has published guideline on "Risk Assessment for the Prevention of Heat Stroke at Work". The guideline lists out the heat stress risk factors that employers need to consider and set out corresponding risk-mitigating measures for employers to adopt in order to reduce the risk of heat stroke among employees.

"If inspections conducted by LD officers reveal that employers have failed to conduct risk assessments in accordance with the guideline, or have not taken appropriate preventive measures in response to the assessment results, they will follow up in accordance with the general duty provisions of the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance and demand immediate improvement. Prosecution will be initiated depending on the seriousness of the case and the evidence available," the spokesman emphasised.

The inspecting officers will check strictly whether employers have considered the various factors listed in the guideline, including temperature, humidity, sunlight exposure, air flow and workload, to carry out the required risk assessment, and whether they have taken corresponding preventive measures, such as providing employees with adequate drinking water, scheduling work to cooler times, arranging more frequent rest periods

and ensuring that the workplace is well ventilated.

The LD will strictly enforce the law to ensure that employers comply with the general duty provisions of the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance and take appropriate measures to reduce the risk of heat stroke for employees at work. Offenders are liable to a maximum fine of \$200,000 and imprisonment for six months.

The LD reminds employers that they must conduct risk assessments on heat stress with reference to the guideline issued by the LD and take corresponding OSH measures to comply with legal requirements and to protect workers' health.