

Measures stepped up to enhance work-above-ground safety in repair, maintenance, alteration and addition works

The Labour Department (LD) is highly concerned about the occurrence of a number of fatal accidents involving workers falling from height to death while carrying out work-above-ground activities adjacent to permanent railings of residential buildings. The LD is saddened by the death of workers in the accidents.

To curb unsafe work-above-ground activities and avoid the recurrence of similar accidents, the LD commenced a Special Enforcement Operation today (March 23) to step up enforcement at repair, maintenance, alteration and addition (RMAA) works sites located in residential buildings with work-above-ground activities being undertaken.

The LD's spokesman said, "It is unsafe to work on ladders as the ladders may topple or the workers may fall down during work. In light of this, during the operation, we will focus on work-above-ground activities with the use of ladders in connection with RMAA works, especially those carried out near permanent railings or parapets of residential buildings, and monitor whether duty holders have provided safe systems of work for the work activities concerned. We 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 and improvement notices and taking out prosecution without prior warning."

The spokesman added, "To ensure the safety of work above ground, contractors and employers should conduct task-specific risk assessment, formulate safe work methods and adopt necessary safety measures and procedures, so as to prevent and eliminate all work-related hazards. In particular, where work cannot be safely done on the ground, contractors and employers shall take adequate steps, including ensuring the use of suitable working platforms with guard rails and toe boards or other safe means of support, and avoiding the use of ladders and substandard scaffolds."

The general duty provisions of the Factories and Industrial Undertakings Ordinance require employers to provide safe working environments, safe plant and safe systems of work for their employees. Those who contravene the above provisions are liable to a maximum fine of \$500,000 and imprisonment for six months.

To raise the awareness of the industry towards hazards related to work above ground, the LD will issue an advisory letter to relevant stakeholders, including property management companies, trade associations, workers' unions and professional bodies of safety practitioners, to urge them to comply with

the requirements of OSH legislation and adopt adequate safety measures while carrying out work-above-ground activities.

To safeguard the safety of workers engaged in work above ground, the LD appeals to contractors and employers to provide plant and systems of work for the work activities concerned that are safe and without risks to health. Employees should co-operate with their employers, adopt all safety measures and use personal protective equipment provided properly to avoid endangering their own work safety and that of other workers.