

Occupational Safety Measures for Workers Engaged in Meal Delivery & Home Care Services

Background

The Labour Department (LD) and the Social Welfare Department (SWD) were invited by LegCo to a case conference on a complaint in relation to the meal delivery service operated by the Yan Chai Hospital – Hong Kong Peninsula Lion Club Hostel (the hostel) on 30 March 2001. The complaint was related to the working conditions in meal delivery and home care services which might breach the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance. LD made an inspection to the Hostel on 14 March 2001. A warning letter for improvement in manual handling operation for meal delivery was subsequently issued. A follow-up visit was conducted on 29 March 2001. It was found that the general working conditions had improved.

2. Follow-up visits were made on 5 June 2001 and 6 June 2002. It was found that the hostel had taken adequate measures, including the provision of a special van for meal delivery, reduction in the total weight of meal sets and the provision of trolley etc., to reduce the risks of manual handling operations by the meal deliverers.

3. Since 1 April 2003, the hostel had ceased the meal delivery service when the service contract expired. The staff involved were redeployed or dismissed.

Meal Delivery Service

4. In 2001 there were 8 non-governmental organizations (NGO) running 9 meal service units out-sourced by SWD. The contract expired on 31 March 2003. The meal delivery service has since been revamped under the 'Enhanced Home and Community Care Service' (EHCCS) and 'Integrated Home Care Service' (IHCS) scheme. At present, there are 23 NGOs providing meal delivery services at 92 centres. The EHCCS and IHCS services encompass a wide range of home-based services and centre-based services. The home-based services include home-making service, provision of meals, transportation and escort service.

Enforcement Actions

5. Since 2001, LD has made 73 inspections to these 23 organizations under the EHCCS and IHCS providing meal delivery service. In general, they have complied with the occupational safety and health legislation. Special vehicles are provided for delivery of meals for long distances. The meal sets handled by the meal delivery workers range from 3 Kg to 18 Kg with an average of 11 Kg. Trolleys, baskets and bags are used to carry the food containers.

Promotional & Educational Activities

6. In the past five years, the Occupational Health Service of LD conducted 51 out-reached health talks at the organizations participating in meal delivery services. On each occasion, the preventive measures for manual handling operations in meal delivery were emphasized. During the same period, 615 health talks were conducted at the Occupational Safety and Health Centre and community halls on manual handling operation, as well as on the prevention of back and upper limb injuries for all workers including those in welfare organizations.

Occupational Injuries

7. The total number of injuries of all the 23 organisations participating in meal delivery service in addition to other welfare services ranged from 473 to 592 between 2000 and 2002 (Table 1). Bearing in mind that the welfare workforce had increased by 40% in the same period (from 32 346 in 2000 to 45 371 in 2002, up by 13 025), the injuries rates actually decreased by 10%.

8. According to information collected at the 33 (out of a total of 92) meal delivery service centres that LD had visited, a total of 65 injuries were sustained by the 500 meal delivery workers in the past five years. Out of these injuries, only one meal delivery worker had injury related to lifting and carrying. The others were mainly minor injuries related to striking against or struck by moving object and slip, trip or fall on the same level.

Conclusion

9. The number of occupational injuries among meal delivery workers in the welfare sector is, relatively speaking, not high and most of them are of a minor nature. However, to safeguard the safety and health of the workers, LD will continue with its on-going enforcement effort. More emphasis would be placed on health promotion and education.

Table 1

**Occupational Injuries in 23 Welfare Organizations
Participating in Meal Delivery and other Welfare Services**

Year	No. of Injuries
2000	473
2001	536
2002	592
Total:	1 601