

Legislative Council Panel on Public Service

Update on Occupational Safety and Health in the Government

Purpose

This paper presents for Members' information an overview on the work of the Civil Service Bureau (CSB) in the promotion of occupational safety and health (OSH) in the Government.

Background

2. The Government as an employer attaches great importance to the safety and health of its employees, including civil servants and non-civil service contract staff. As an illustration, the Government signed in September 1996 the Occupational Safety Charter to pledge its commitment to work with staff towards a healthy and safe working environment. The Charter emphasizes the importance of safety at work as a shared responsibility of the management and staff.

Overview of the OSH Framework in the Government

3. CSB assumes a central role in promoting and facilitating the implementation of OSH measures and safety management systems (SMSs) in government bureaux/departments (B/Ds). It provides necessary aids and, where justified, funding for B/Ds to set up their SMSs and conduct their OSH work. It keeps an oversight of OSH in the Government. From time to time, with the professional support of Labour Department (LD) and the Occupational Safety and Health Council (OSHC), it organizes service-wide educational and publicity programmes to promote OSH at work in the Government.

4. B/Ds are responsible for executing the required planning and implementation of appropriate OSH measures which are commensurate with and suit their functional and operational needs. They also organise or encourage their staff to participate in educational and publicity activities to

maintain a good level of OSH awareness. Where appropriate, they receive funding from CSB to help them develop, enhance or audit their SMSs, organise tailor-made training programmes and promotional activities, and pursue continuous improvement of OSH practices.

5. To better coordinate the work of B/Ds and to enable cross-fertilisation of OSH knowledge and experience, a Working Group on OSH (the Working Group) has been in operation since 1996 to examine issues of OSH at work which have a service-wide impact. The Working Group is chaired by a Deputy Secretary for the Civil Service and comprises representatives from the OSHC, LD, the staff sides of the four Central Consultative Councils and departmental management of selected government departments.

Promotion of OSH in the Government

6. Over the years, CSB has been promoting OSH in the Government through implementing various OSH initiatives and organising different service-wide publicity and educational programmes and activities. Some major initiatives and programmes are described briefly in the ensuing paragraphs.

Safety Management System (SMS)

7. To enable effective management of OSH issues, CSB has been actively encouraging B/Ds to set up their own SMSs, establish safety management committees, draw up departmental safety guidelines and operational manuals, and provide personal protective equipment or gears to their staff, having regard to the nature of work and the working environment. To this end, CSB has developed and distributed to B/Ds a utility kit 'A Practical Guide on Safety Management System'. Where appropriate, we encourage B/Ds to engage outside professional service, such as the OSH auditing/consultancy service provided by the OSHC, to assist in the formulation and verification of their SMSs to ensure that they are adequate in meeting current operational needs. According to a survey conducted in 2004-05, B/Ds have set up SMSs, comprising different components that suit their size, structure and operational requirements.

Educational and promotional activities

8. CSB has been organising service-wide OSH educational and publicity programmes which focus on the major areas of concern common to B/Ds. They include talks, seminars, and experience-sharing workshops; and cover a wide range of topics on OSH. Since 1996, around 150 seminars and events, attended by a cumulative total of over 56 000 participants, have been organised. A list of such activities organised by CSB in the last three years is set out in **Annex**. In addition, a Civil Service OSH Day was launched in 2005 to demonstrate the collective efforts of both the management and the staff sides in the promotion of OSH and consolidate our experience in the past years.

Funding to B/Ds

9. Since 2001-02, CSB has been providing funds to B/Ds to encourage them to further develop and enhance their SMSs and strengthen their promotional and educational efforts. The funding is in addition to the provisions which B/Ds regularly set aside for the promotion and implementation of departmental OSH measures. So far, a total of \$9 million has been allocated to 29 B/Ds to help them launch 68 OSH projects. These OSH projects include engaging consultants to develop, enhance or audit SMSs; organising training programmes and promotional activities; producing safety operation manuals; and pursuing continuous improvement of OSH practices.

Visits to B/Ds

10. To promote and enhance communication with B/Ds, CSB, in conjunction with LD and the Working Group, has been conducting regular visits to B/Ds since June 2005. The purpose of these visits is to share views and experience, especially those of the LD representative, in the promotion of OSH in the workplace; render professional advice to participants on OSH issues; and encourage B/Ds to sustain the momentum in promoting OSH in their workplace. Experience shows that these visits have proved to be a useful forum for gathering first-hand OSH information on the ground and sharing experience and views on common OSH issues.

Other related initiatives

11. In planning and organising its OSH activities, CSB has kept in view prevailing OSH and other health-related issues affecting government employees to ensure that the activities planned and organised are able to meet their needs. For example, CSB launched a pilot scheme in 1999-2000 to provide professional hotline counselling service to help staff cope with stress associated with adjusting to and coping with changes brought about by new service initiatives, management reforms and changing demands, and other personal problems. The hotline service has proved to be very helpful to staff and, in view of the success, we have been running the hotline as a regular service to promote work-life balance.

12. Apart from the above, we have also introduced a series of personal effectiveness and stress management courses and seminars to promote healthy lifestyle and healthy workplace as a regular part of our general training programmes for staff, e.g., classes/seminars/workshops on topics like “Stress Management”, “Executive Health”, “Emotional Quotient”. A total of 148 classes/seminars/workshops, attended by over 6 000 staff, were organized in the three years from 2004 to 2006.

Recent OSH Statistical Trends

13. To identify areas which are of common concern to B/Ds and to ensure that our promotional efforts are geared towards their needs, we keep under constant review relevant OSH-related statistics in the Government. The following table summarizes the occupational injury position of government employees (including civil servants and non-civil service contract staff) from 2001 onwards and compares the injury rate of government employees with that of the total work force in Hong Kong. It shows that the annual number of occupational injury incidents in the Government has been quite stable in recent years and the injury rate of government employees is slightly below the overall work force injury rate.

	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006 (1st half)
No. of occupational injuries	3 077	2 947	2 913	2 949	2 887	1 265
Injury rate (per 1,000 employees)	16.2 (21.6)	15.8 (19.2)	15.9 (17.7)	16.6 (18.1)	16.6 (17.8)	14.7 (17.5)

The statistics refer to occupational injuries arising from work accidents, resulting in death or incapacity for work of over 3 consecutive days and reported under the Employees' Compensation Ordinance.

Figures in brackets denote the corresponding injury rates published by Labour Department for the overall work force in Hong Kong in the respective years.

14. A large number of the injuries were sustained as a result of accidental falls/trips or whilst lifting or carrying objects. The six major categories which accounted for about 80% of the total number of injuries suffered by government employees are set out below:

Type of accident	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006 (1st half)
Slip, trip or fall on same level	926	888	909	900	921	396
Injured whilst lifting or carrying	536	459	577	693	576	281
Striking against or struck by moving object	317	350	169	239	260	98
Struck by moving vehicle	298	254	250	214	271	108
Injured in workplace violence	197	232	263	246	245	114
Striking against fixed or stationary object	270	234	163	158	153	68

15. To raise staff awareness and to reduce the risk of injury in these categories, talks and seminars on specific OSH topics (e.g. "Driving and road safety", "How to handle potentially violent clients") have been regularly held. As part of our educational programme, last year we also staged a roving exhibition on "Prevention of Musculoskeletal Disorders" which helped staff understand the causes of musculoskeletal disorder and the preventive measures.

16. On occupational diseases, we have recorded on average 11 confirmed cases each year from 2001 to the first half of 2006. The prevalent occupational disease is inflammation of the tendons of the hand or forearm, or of the associated tendon sheaths, which is mainly caused by quick, repetitive and strenuous movements of the relevant parts for prolonged periods at work (e.g. computer data input work). We have, through various seminars (e.g. "Health hints on the use of display screen equipment"), advised staff to perform different types of work alternately and have periodic breaks. The roving exhibition on "Prevention of Musculoskeletal Disorders" held in 2006 also provided staff with advice on the importance of proper posture, workstation design and relaxation exercise.

Continuous Improvements

17. We have recently embarked on two new initiatives. The first one is the launching of an OSH thematic website in July 2006. This website acts as a one-stop-shop to provide useful information and tips on general OSH matters in the Government, including links to relevant ordinances and statutory regulations on OSH, other useful reference materials on specific OSH topics and good OSH practices of B/Ds to facilitate information and experience sharing among B/Ds. The second initiative is the launching of a pilot scheme to give officers dealing with OSH issues in B/Ds the opportunity to observe and learn about successful experience in other government departments as well as exchange views among themselves on specific OSH implementation issues. Responses of B/D towards the scheme have been positive. We will continue to identify suitable departments for conducting benchmark visits and consider extending the scheme to public and private organisations which are ready to share their successful OSH experience.

18. We will conduct a survey of OSH practices and statistics at the departmental level this year. The information gathered will:

- (a) assist CSB at the centre to keep track of the overall trend of OSH in the Government and identify areas of deficiencies. The information will greatly assist our longitudinal analysis over the years and the planning of OSH promotional and educational activities to address specific areas of common concern; and

- (b) serve as regular reminders for B/Ds to devote constant and adequate attention and efforts to OSH and help alert them to problematic areas and necessary follow-up actions.

Way Forward

19. Promoting OSH is an on-going commitment of the Government as an employer. CSB will continue to work with B/Ds and the staff to provide a safer and healthier working environment in the Government.

Civil Service Bureau
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**Occupational Safety and Health Promotional and Publicity Activities
organised by the Civil Service Bureau from 2004 to 2006**

Item No	Topic	No. of Programmes (No. of Attendees)			
		2004	2005	2006	TOTAL
A. Occupational Safety					
1.	How to Handle Potentially Violent Clients	1 (850)	3 (1 360)	2 (860)	6 (3 070)
2.	First Aid Care	2 (560)	2 (540)	4 (1 115)	8 (2 215)
3.	Anti-Mosquito Measures and Personal Protective Equipment	1 (290)	1 (310)	1 (350)	3 (950)
4.	Driving and Road Safety	1 (170)	1 (230)	1 (250)	3 (650)
5.	Prevention of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS) and Personal Protective Equipment	1 (480)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (480)
6.	Handling of Emergencies in Workplace	1 (950)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (950)
7.	Occupational Contact Dermatitis	1 (320)	0 (0)	0 (0)	1 (320)
	Sub-total:	8 (3 620)	7 (2 440)	8 (2 575)	23 (8 635)
B. Occupational Health					
1.	Prevention of Musculoskeletal Disorders	3 (1 440)	5 (2 220)	4 (1 480)	12 (5 140)
2.	Stress Management	2 (1 240)	2 (880)	4 (1 880)	8 (4 000)
3.	Health Hints on the Use of Display Screen Equipment	1 (290)	2 (630)	3 (920)	6 (1 840)
4.	Occupational Health for Office Workers	1 (280)	2 (440)	2 (540)	5 (1 260)
5.	The Influence of Office Ventilation on Occupational Health	1 (230)	1 (150)	1 (260)	3 (640)
6.	Fitness/Health at Work	1 (300)	1 (430)	0 (0)	2 (730)
	Sub-total:	9 (3 780)	13 (4 750)	14 (5 080)	36 (13 610)
	General OSH promotion activities such as experience sharing seminars, workshops and benchmark visits, etc.	1 (300)	6 (720)	5 (410)	12 (1 430)
	TOTAL	18 (7 700)	26 (7 910)	27 (8 065)	71 (23 675)