

For information on
16 October 2017

Legislative Council Panel on Public Service
Manpower Situation of the
Occupational Safety Officer Grade of the Labour Department

Purpose

This paper aims to brief Members on the manpower situation of the Occupational Safety Officer (“OSO”) grade of the Labour Department (“LD”).

Background Information

2. The work to safeguard occupational safety of employees is mainly undertaken by the OSO grade staff of LD. The major duties of OSOs include inspection and enforcement, education and training as well as publicity and promotion as detailed below:

- to enforce relevant provisions stipulated in the Occupational Safety and Health Ordinance (Cap. 509), the Factories and Industrial Undertakings Ordinance (Cap. 59) and their subsidiary legislation to ensure that the occupational safety requirements are complied with;
- to inspect workplaces, carry out investigations into work accidents and occupational safety complaints; and advise employers and employees on how to reduce workplace hazards;
- to facilitate the development and implementation of safety management systems and advise responsible persons of workplaces on safety design and layout as well as implementation of safety programmes, etc.;
- to instill safety awareness to employers, employees and the public with a view to inculcating a safety culture in the society; and
- to organise training courses on relevant occupational safety and health (“OSH”) legislation and provide services in relation to mandatory safety training and safety practitioners.

3. In recent years, the OSO grade has been facing significant challenges. Apart from the workload arising from the growth of the labour force, public concern about occupational safety has been mounting particularly about serious industrial accidents, and there is an expectation for OSOs to do more to help enhance the occupational safety performance in Hong Kong.

4. In addition, the construction industry has been blooming in recent years. With the commencement of a number of major infrastructure projects, such as the Express Rail Link Project – Hong Kong section, MTR Shatin to Central Link Project (“SCL”), Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge (“HZMB”) local projects, and the significant amount of repair and maintenance works of old buildings as required under the Mandatory Building Inspection Scheme, the number of construction workers has significantly increased by almost 62% from over 71 000 in 2012 to over 115 000 in the first half of 2017. All these bring challenges to the occupational safety of the construction industry. Although Hong Kong’s overall occupational safety performance has been continuously improving as demonstrated by the decrease in the accident rate per thousand workers from 21.3 in 2012 to 17.1 in 2016, the number of fatal industrial accidents and the industrial accident rate per thousand workers of the construction industry remain the highest among all sectors. There were a total of 14 fatal accidents in the construction industry so far this year, including two accidents causing double and triple fatalities. LD has therefore accorded top priority to promote occupational safety of the construction industry, which is one of the key areas of work of front-line OSOs.

Manpower Situation of the OSO Grade and Mitigation Measures

5. LD has been paying close attention to the workload of the OSO grade and has strived to strengthen the establishment of the OSO grade to meet our operational needs and to ensure effective delivery of our services. According to LD’s records, the establishment of the OSO grade has increased by 17.4% from 363 posts in 2010 to 426 posts at present, with 63 posts newly created. Meanwhile, the establishment of the OSO grade in the Operations Division¹ has also increased from 268 posts to 315 posts.

6. In addition to striving to strengthen OSO manpower to meet operational needs, LD also adopts a risk-based approach in formulating timely

¹ Operations Division is responsible for frontline inspection and enforcement work.

enforcement strategy and inspection priority, with due regard to the potential hazards at workplaces, the nature of work and past safety records of such workplaces, with a view to optimising the effectiveness of our inspections for improving OSH performance of various industries. LD also launches special enforcement operations targeting at industries involving high-risk processes such as the construction industry as well as the food and beverage services industry, work activities that are more prone to serious accidents like work-at-height and lifting operations, and organisations with poor safety records. We also strengthen publicity and promotion, as well as education and training work.

7. Apart from the above, LD has also been adopting measures to relieve the workload of the OSO grade and enhance their operational efficiency through work process re-engineering, work streamlining, internal staff redeployment and enhancement of staff training. The measures include:

Process re-engineering

- To review and reorganise some work (e.g. OSH's complaint handling mechanism) with a view to optimizing deployment of the manpower resources and enhancing work efficiency.

Work streamlining

- To review workflow so as to streamline the work, and to issue clearer guidelines for relieving the work pressure of frontline staff.

Internal staff deployment

- In the wake of the spate of fatal industrial accidents that happened recently in the construction industry, the manpower of the Building and Engineering Construction ("BEC") offices has been strengthened through internal deployment of OSOs to assist in investigation of accidents as well as enhancing inspection and enforcement work with a view to relieving the work pressure of frontline staff working in BEC offices.

Enhancing staff training

- To relieve work pressure and improve work efficiency, LD has enhanced staff training, including making arrangement for OSOs to enroll to/participate in relevant training programmes or seminars, and arranging

professionals to deliver talks in OSH Branch's internal seminars twice a year so that colleagues are equipped to handle work challenges ahead more effectively and positively.

8. LD will continue to closely monitor the manpower situation of the OSO grade and their workload. In particular, LD will facilitate the handling of the increasing safety-related work arising from the mega infrastructure projects and the renovation and maintenance works in recent years. In this regard, LD has deployed existing and additional resources to set up the following offices:

- In 2009, LD established a dedicated Minor Renovation and Maintenance Works ("MRM") Office in order to improve the OSH of the renovation and maintenance works.
- In light of the commencement of mega infrastructure projects and for further enhancement of the OSH of the renovation and maintenance works, LD established a dedicated Mega Infrastructure Projects ("MIP") Office and two additional MRM Offices in 2011.
- With the expansion of the mega infrastructure projects that involved more high-risk processes, LD established three additional MIP Offices in 2012, 2013 and 2014 respectively to cope with the increasing workload.

9. Up to September 2017, LD has established four dedicated MIP Offices responsible for monitoring the OSH of mega infrastructure projects, including mega railway projects (SCL, South Island Line), HZMB Project, Express Rail Link Project, West Kowloon Cultural District, Kai Tak Development, etc.; three dedicated offices for monitoring the OSH of the airport and railways, as well as four MRM Offices for monitoring the OSH of minor renovation and maintenance works scattered in Hong Kong, Kowloon, New Territories East and New Territories West regions respectively.

10. LD will continue to seek additional manpower and adopt the aforesaid measures, including formulating timely enforcement strategy with reference to prevailing risks, in order to ensure that the OSO grade is adequately staffed to handle the work for safeguarding the occupational safety of employees and to assist in improving Hong Kong's occupational safety performance.

For information

11. Members are invited to note the information above.

Labour Department
Labour and Welfare Bureau
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