

**Administration's response to issues raised  
at the meeting of the LegCo Subcommittee  
on regulation relating to  
Occupational Safety and Health  
on 14 December 1998**

**To provide detailed information on the overseas requirement that a boatswain chair  
should measure 74 cm in depth**

At the meeting on 14 December 1998, the Administration said that according to a recommendation of the International Labour Organisation, an equipment similar to a suspended device under discussion should be not less than 75 cm deep.

The relevant recommendation is the *Safety Provisions (Building) Recommendation 1937*. Regulation 13 of the Recommendation provides that a skip, large basket, boatswain's chair or similar equipment shall only be used as a suspended scaffold in exceptional circumstances for work of short duration, and under the supervision of a responsible person. When a skip or large basket is used as a suspended scaffold, it shall be at least 75 cm deep and shall be carried by two strong iron bands which shall be properly fastened, shall be continued round the sides and bottom and shall have eyes in the iron to receive the ropes.

The *Construction (Health, Safety and Welfare) Regulations 1996* of the United Kingdom provides that suitable and sufficient steps shall be taken to prevent, so far as is reasonably practicable, any person falling. Where it is not practicable to comply with the requirements in the Regulations regarding the prevention of falls, there shall be provided and used suitable personal suspension equipment (which includes a boatswain's chair) which shall comply with the provision of Schedule 3 of the Regulations. This Schedule requires, among other things, that the boatswain's chair must provide stable and adequate support but does not specify the detailed standards. The British Standard (*Specification for suspended access equipment (suspended chairs, traditional steeplejack's seats, work cages, cradles and platforms) for use in the building, engineering construction, steeplejack and cleaning industries*) BS2830: 1994 specifies that the bottom of the chair shall be not less than 450 mm nor more than 610 mm wide and not less than 225 mm from front to back. According to

the notes on “*Safe Working on Roofs and at Heights*” published by the Construction Industry Training Board of the UK in 1992, a boatswain’s chair should be between 450 and 610 mm wide, not less than 225 mm deep and have a back not less than 250 mm above seat.

According to standards for “*safety requirements for scaffolding*” of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration of the USA, the size of the chair should be not less than 12 by 24 inches and of 1-inch thickness.

The Administration found that many overseas laws did not provide detailed specifications on the construction of a boatswain’s chair or similar devices. But, they would require that a boatswain’s chair should be used in special or exceptional circumstances. For instance, in Indonesia, the law states that “Boatswain’s chair and similar equipment shall be used as scaffolds only in *exceptional circumstances* when the *work cannot safely be done by other means*.” In the Philippines, the occupational safety and health legislation states that “skip, bracket, basket and boatswain’s chair shall not be used as substitute for a suspended scaffold unless the work is of *such short duration* and the work is under the supervision of the person responsible for the construction.”

**To provide medical advice on risks of boatswain chairs workers to sustain spinal injuries, given that they were not supported at the back while working at height.**

The Occupational Health Consultant of the Labour Department has provided the following piece of medical advice:

“The ‘boatswain’s chair’ used in Hong Kong is in fact not a chair but simply a piece of suspended board without back and feet supports. I understand that the worker is required to work continuously for eight hours with short breaks intermittently to refill the bucket with paint. From the ergonomic point of view, this is a very poor design. Prolonged sitting in such working posture would cause chronic strain to the back.”