

For information on  
24 August 2021

## **Legislative Council Panel on Manpower**

### **Occupational Disease and Occupational Health Situation in the First Half of 2021**

#### **Purpose**

This paper briefs Members on the occupational disease and occupational health situation in Hong Kong in the first half of 2021, as well as the occupational health promotion and enforcement work of the Labour Department (“LD”).

#### **Occupational Disease**

2. According to the definition of the International Labour Organization (“ILO”), occupational disease refers to a disease which has a definite causal relationship with specific exposure in the working environment or work activity, and the risk of the exposed workers contracting the disease is significantly higher than that in the rest of the population, so that the occupational origin of the disease in an exposed worker can be reasonably presumed.

3. In Hong Kong, there is currently a total of 52 occupational diseases prescribed under the Employees’ Compensation Ordinance (“ECO”), Occupational Deafness (Compensation) Ordinance and Pneumoconiosis and Mesothelioma (Compensation) Ordinance . In considering whether a particular disease should be prescribed as a statutory occupational disease or whether the coverage of certain occupational diseases should be expanded, LD generally makes reference to the ILO criteria and adopts an evidence-based approach to assess whether a definite causal relationship exists between a disease and specific hazard exposure at work, and whether the risk of the exposed workers contracting the disease is significantly higher than that among the general public. This includes perusing relevant medical information as well as local and overseas research and epidemiological data.

## **Confirmed Cases of Occupational Diseases in the First Half of 2021**

4. In the first half of 2021, the number of confirmed cases of occupational diseases was 240. The common occupational diseases included occupational deafness, silicosis, mesothelioma and tenosynovitis of the hand or forearm. Details are set out in paragraphs 5 to 9 below and the relevant statistics are at **Annex**.

### ***Occupational Deafness***

5. Occupational deafness is permanent hearing loss arising from at least five to ten years of exposure to noisy environment at work in specified occupations. In the first half of 2021, there were 178 confirmed cases of occupational deafness (including monaural hearing loss). Most of these cases were involved in rock grinding, chiselling, cutting or percussion and working in close proximity to internal combustion engines, turbines or pressurised jet engines.

### ***Silicosis***

6. Silicosis is a fibrotic lung disease caused by inhalation of silica dust. Its latent period could be as long as 10 to 20 years. The disease in most cases was attributable to inhalation of silica dust at work many years ago and most cases were construction workers. The number of confirmed cases of silicosis was 35 in the first half of 2021.

### ***Mesothelioma***

7. Workers engaged in demolition works, ship repairing and maintenance, boiler repairing, etc., may have exposure to asbestos-containing materials. Inhalation of asbestos dusts at work could lead to mesothelioma, and the latent period of the disease generally could be as long as 30 to 40 years. In the first half of 2021, there were 9 confirmed cases of mesothelioma.

### ***Tenosynovitis of the Hand or Forearm***

8. ECO prescribes six musculoskeletal diseases (including tenosynovitis of the hand or forearm) as occupational diseases, because epidemiological evidence reveals that these diseases have specific relationship with certain occupations. For example, prolonged repetitive actions or excessive force exerted by the hand at work could cause tenosynovitis. In the first half of 2021, there were 7 confirmed cases of tenosynovitis of the hand or forearm, with patients engaged in service industries and sales, elementary occupations, etc.

LD will continue to conduct publicity for duty holders and workers of relevant industries to enhance their awareness on prevention of upper limb musculoskeletal diseases.

### ***Other Occupational Diseases***

9. Other confirmed cases of occupational diseases in the first half of 2021 included 6 cases of tuberculosis and 5 cases of gas poisoning.

## **Occupational Health Situation**

### ***Initiatives to Enhance Occupational Health***

10. LD has been promoting the awareness of employers and employees on the prevention of occupational and work-related diseases through organising health talks and seminars, distributing educational publications, broadcasting Announcements in the Public Interest (“APIs”) on television and the radio, publishing feature articles in newspapers, showing educational videos and displaying advertisements on mobile advertising media from time to time. Besides, LD also organises outreaching health talks. In the first half of 2021, LD organised over 350 occupational health talks for about 20 300 participants. The topics included prevention of upper limb and lower limb disorders, manual handling operations and prevention of back injuries, heat stroke prevention, occupational stress and occupational health of catering workers, etc. Owing to the COVID-19 epidemic, some of the health talks were conducted online so that employers and employees could continue to participate.

11. LD also collaborated with the Occupational Safety and Health Council (“OSHC”), Pneumoconiosis Compensation Fund Board, Occupational Deafness Compensation Board, employers’ associations and workers’ unions in promoting occupational health through a variety of activities. These included organisation of health talks and occupational health award, distribution of promotional materials, etc. Some of the activities were also conducted online because of the COVID-19 epidemic.

### ***Prevention of Heat Stroke at Work***

12. LD launched a large-scale promotional campaign on heat stroke prevention in collaboration with OSHC in April this year. Through outreach visits and extensive publicity, the campaign sought to remind outdoor workers of the potential hazards of working under very hot weather and the need to take suitable preventive measures. The main targets of the outreach visits were employees

undertaking manual work and/or those who often needed to work outdoors. These included construction workers, outdoor cleansing workers, horticulture workers, security guards, container terminal workers, airport apron workers, recycling workers, electrical and mechanical industry workers, postal workers and couriers. During the visits, LD and OSHC distributed protective equipment and information on heat stroke prevention to workers. As at 23 July, LD and OSHC conducted a total of 15 outreach promotional visits. Besides, we publicised the importance of heat stroke prevention through different channels, including broadcasting a publicity video on a number of television channels and government premises, adding heat stroke prevention messages in television and radio programmes, displaying advertisements at the escalators of many MTR stations and on the bodies of buses running in different routes, and putting up roadside banners in various districts throughout the territory. We also made further use of online media to publicise heat stroke prevention messages including posting a feature article at online platform which attracted about 35 000 hits.

13. To enhance workers' awareness of heat stroke and encourage them to adopt related preventive measures, LD and OSHC launched the Portable Waist Fan Sponsorship Scheme for Small and Medium-sized Enterprises ("SMEs") in April this year to sponsor SMEs in nine industries with a higher risk of heat stroke to buy portable waist fans at a discounted price. The scheme received an overwhelming response from the industries after its launch. We received a total of 2 035 applications involving more than 21 000 sets of fans.

14. In respect of inspection and enforcement, LD continues to step up inspections during April to September this year, targeting at outdoor workplaces with a higher risk of heat stroke, including construction sites, container terminals/container yards, and workplaces of outdoor cleansing workers, horticulture workers and security guards. During the inspections, LD would check whether the duty holders had taken appropriate preventive measures, including providing adequate drinking water to employees, keeping employees off direct sunlight as far as possible, ensuring good ventilation at the workplaces, and providing suitable rest breaks, etc., with a view to effectively safeguarding employees' occupational safety and health. If employers were found to have failed to adopt appropriate measures during the inspections, LD would take appropriate enforcement actions, including taking out prosecution when there was sufficient evidence. Up to 30 June, LD conducted about 13 100 inspections and issued 12 warning letters. Moreover, LD launched a 4-week special inspection campaign on 21 June this year. During the campaign, occupational hygienists of LD conducted in-depth inspections to 120 workplaces with a higher risk of heat stroke and issued 2 warning letters. The inspection findings indicated that a vast majority of the employers and contractors had conducted risk assessment on heat stress at work and taken appropriate preventive measures. During the inspections, the occupational hygienists also introduced and promoted various

ways to mitigate heat stress risk to the employers and contractors, including the use of portable waist fans and uniform made of dry-fit materials that facilitate heat dissipation.

### ***Establishment of the Central Promotion Team***

15. To better assist large corporations in enhancing their occupational health performance, the Occupational Health Service of LD set up a Central Promotion Team in August last year. The Team aims to promote good work practice to the management of these corporations to safeguard the occupational health of employees. The Team will set the promotion theme with regard to the work situation and occupational health risks of different industries. Team members will arrange visits to the targeted large corporations to explain the relevant requirements under the legislation and guidelines relating to the theme and urge them, through formulating or refining the company policy, to implement relevant measures through a top-down, holistic and unified approach for strengthening the protection of workers' health at work.

16. Since its set up, the Central Promotion Team has conducted promotional visits to large corporations of different industries to explain potential health hazards of standing work, with a view to helping them to comply with the requirements in the "Guidance Notes on Standing at Work and Service Counter Design" issued by LD, and further protecting their employees from the health risks arising from standing at work. For details, please refer to a document issued by LD for another agenda item of the Panel meeting. In addition, LD conducted promotional visits to the management of all the five contractors undertaking street cleansing services for the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department last year, helping them to take preventive measures for cleansing workers against heat stroke at work. The five contractors responded positively to our promotional visits. In May and June this year, LD conducted field inspections to the workplaces of the contractors. It was found that after the promotional visits, all five contractors had strengthened a number of heat stroke preventive measures, including provision of cooling products for workers to use, explaining the hazards of and preventive measures against heat stroke to workers, displaying posters at the workplaces, using the "Heat Stress Assessment Checklist" produced by LD to conduct risk assessment of heat stress and keeping the assessment records, etc.

17. In the latter half of this year, the Team will target large corporations from the construction industry to promote the prevention of silicosis and occupational deafness.

### ***Mental Health Workplace Charter***

18. LD has been collaborating with DH and the OSHC to implement the Mental Health Workplace Charter (“Charter”) since July 2020. The Charter aims to promote mental health in the workplace, develop a culture of active listening and communication, facilitate early identification of mentally disturbed colleagues and provide them with an inclusive and friendly working environment.

19. Organisations signing the Charter are entitled to professional support and information on community resources on mental health. They can attain the title of “Mental Health Friendly Organisation” or “Mental Health Friendly Supreme Organisation” for listing in the Charter website if they commit to complete a specified number of action items, such as organising interest groups, arranging staff to participate in training courses on mental health and communication skills, providing employee assistance scheme, implementing work-life balance measures, etc. As at the end of July 2021, 520 and 229 organisations were awarded the title of “Mental Health Friendly Organisation” and “Mental Health Friendly Supreme Organisation” respectively.

### **Clinical Service of Occupational Health Clinics**

20. LD runs two occupational health clinics in Kwun Tong and Fanling, providing clinical consultation service to all employees in Hong Kong Island, Kowloon, and the New Territories. Employees who suspect their diseases to be work-related can make an appointment in these two clinics for diagnosis and treatment. The doctors will examine the patients’ comprehensive medical and occupational history and the circumstances of the work, body condition and the relevant living habit, and conduct physical examinations and arrange relevant laboratory tests. They may also arrange inspections to patients’ workplaces if necessary to understand whether there are hazardous factors in their workplaces that are related to the diseases. Through comprehensive analysis of such information, the doctors can diagnose whether the patients’ conditions are consistent with occupational diseases or other work-related diseases, and provide suitable treatment for them. For the convenience of employees in seeking clinical consultations, the occupational health clinics also provide services on Saturday mornings. In the first half of 2021, the clinics provided a total of 4 248 clinical consultations.

21. LD promotes the services of the occupational health clinics by distributing pamphlets and posters on clinics services in health talks and seminars as well as putting up advertisements via the internet, newsletters of unions and publications of OSHC. LD also makes arrangement for displaying advertisement of the clinic services on major public transport including buses, minibuses and

railways, as well as broadcasting television and radio APIs from time to time to raise the public awareness of clinic services.

### **Way Forward**

22. LD will continue to actively promote the prevention of occupational and work-related diseases, enhance the awareness of employers and employees on occupational health and ensure their compliance with occupational safety and health legislation through enforcement.

Labour and Welfare Bureau  
Labour Department  
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**Confirmed Cases of Occupational Diseases  
from 2017 to the First Half of 2021**

<b>Occupational disease</b>	<b>2017</b>	<b>2018</b>	<b>2019</b>	<b>2020</b>	<b>The first half of 2021</b>
Occupational deafness	177	275	308	78	178
Silicosis	54	59	52	88	35
Mesothelioma	16	10	10	12	9
Tenosynovitis of the hand or forearm	39	39	35	17	7
Tuberculosis	9	4	5	3	6
Gas poisoning	1	4	17	3	5
Asbestosis	2	2	7	12	0
Occupational dermatitis	3	3	5	2	0
Compressed air illness	1	1	1	0	0
Others	2	3	2	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>304</b>	<b>400</b>	<b>442</b>	<b>216</b>	<b>240</b>