



OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH

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Recalcitrant Bodies, Deficient Monitoring Problems of Asbestos are on the verge of Breaking Out.

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- Participatory Work Stress Management Workshop.
- Action Research and Advocacy of Occupational Health of Ethnic Minorities in Hong Kong

What's New -

- HKWHC's view on the suggestion to ban all asbestos by the Panel on Environmental Affairs of the Legislative Council.
- "Concern for Asbestos Health Problems of Workers in the Demolition of Old Buildings" Press Conference.

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"Occupational Health" is the publication of Hong Kong Workers' Health Centre (WHC). The purpose of this newsletter is to share our concerns, issues and initiatives on occupational health with the general public in Hong Kong and Mainland China. The information and comments that appear in this newsletter do not necessarily represent the official position of WHC, and WHC will not assume any legal liability or be responsible for damages caused by use of the contents in this newsletter. For those who want to use the contents of this newsletter for their own writings, please quote references to this newsletter accordingly.

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Firm in our belief, continuing to promote the long term development of occupational health and safety measures in Hong Kong

The Hong Kong Workers' Health Centre has been promoting the complete prohibition of importing and using of all asbestos for many years, and has followed up related issues with different organizations and legislative council members. The LegCo Environmental Affairs committee were discussing about the issue "Suggestion to ban all types of asbestos" at the time of writing this piece. Although we do not know the final results of the discussion, the Centre is still greatly encouraged by the fact that the government is willing to address related subjects actively.

In fact in this half year, we often meet a significant number of professionals in different occasions expressing their concern about Hong Kong's occupational health and safety, and they are pessimistic towards the outlook of Hong Kong. These professionals have long since supported our Centre and followed closely on Hong Kong's problems in occupational health, as well as showed concern for the recovery situation of workers with occupational injuries. Seeing in recent years how the policies and measures in the Mainland and Taiwan can go with the times, it shows even more prominently how Hong Kong is behind and outdated in policy and support. As to how to interpret this phenomenon, it is believed that there are already quite a number of comments in society analyzing the problem.

As an organization attending to occupational health for more than 25 years in Hong Kong, the Centre believes that even though the policies for occupational health are at a bottleneck situation, we will still continue to promote the development of related policies with persistence and a strong belief, and protect the occupational health of front line workers.



Recalcitrant Bodies, Deficient Monitoring Problems of Asbestos are on the verge of Breaking Out

Problems of asbestos could happen at any moment. As some of the buildings in Hong Kong are aging constantly and due to societal needs, many decantation processes of old buildings have been carried out in recent years. This causes the construction materials from old buildings which contain asbestos to be exposed to the chance of being damaged and may release asbestos fibres, which will cause damage to the workers' and citizens' health. Asbestos is a kind of material which has been proved hazardous to the human body when inhaled; taking in asbestos fibres will lead to chances of getting diseases such as asbestosis and mesothelioma. In Hong Kong, asbestos is mainly used as heat insulators, fireproof materials and sound insulators. The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) had once expressed that most buildings in Hong Kong aged over 30 years have asbestos in them.



The Hong Kong government have long since recognized the dangers of asbestos towards the human body, and thus set “Air Pollution Control (Asbestos) (Administration) Regulation” and “Factories and Industrial Undertaking (Asbestos) Regulation” in 1996 and 1997 respectively, authorized the EPD and the Labour Department authority to monitor the demolition of asbestos-containing construction materials. However, related government bodies have not exercised enough monitoring, and the problems of asbestos still appear from time to time. Last year, HKWHC found that the EPD and the Hong Kong Labour Department did not require the rescue workers in the To Kwa Wan case of the collapsed old building to wear appropriate protection equipment, and due to this, workers had the chance to inhale the released asbestos dust. Following that, on 14th February and 16th March this year, the HKWHC have once again found that the EPD and the Hong Kong Labour Department have not done their job of monitoring well, and have let construction contractors go against the law to demolish houses and warehouses which have been proved to contain asbestos, and dispose of the rubble around the construction site, including the sidewalks and some empty housing estates which are waiting to be demolished. This increases the chance of workers and citizens nearby to contract diseases such as asbestosis and mesothelioma due to inhalation of asbestos.

Regarding this, HKWHC hopes that related government departments can carry out the following measures and follow-ups immediately.

1. The EPD should set a complete monitoring system based on this incident, and closely monitor decantation, renovation and reconstruction processes in future. They should also conduct asbestos investigation work, prepare asbestos investigation reports and plans for the abatement of asbestos starting work on a building. They should also let other government departments and construction contractors make appropriate arrangements to their construction according to the reports and plans. Other than that, the public, contractors and workers all have the right to know everything that is related to their health, therefore the EPD should publicly disclose the list of buildings containing asbestos and raise the awareness of related individuals and nearby residents towards the issue.
2. Apart from the EPD, the Hong Kong Labour Department should also enforce its monitoring work towards construction, including arranging air monitoring to determine whether the level of asbestos exposure would cause damage towards the health of nearby citizens and workers. They should also monitor whether the construction risk control measures are enough, and at the same time see whether workers are correctly using qualified personal protective equipment when carrying out asbestos removal works. Medical surveillance should be provided to workers and nearby residents in order to protect their health.
3. Apart from these, the EPD and the Hong Kong Labour Department should face the severity of this incident and make binding regulations. HKWHC strongly urges the EPD and the Hong Kong Labour Department to take legal actions towards the owner of the construction site and related business owners (including contractors and developers), and punish them according to the rules. Other than that, we also hope that the EPD and the Hong Kong Labour Department can monitor and make regulations to those renovation and reconstruction events which involve asbestos that are in progress or will be started. This can protect all the health of all affected people.

We urge government bodies to pay attention to the incident and consider the above suggestions to protect the health of workers and citizens.





Participatory Work Stress Management Workshop

The participatory work stress management workshop invited the Chairman of the International Commission on Occupational Health, Dr. Kazutaka Kogi as the main speaker. Dr. Kazutaka Kogi has extensive training experience, and by participatory trainings and sharing of experience, he succeeded in encouraging front-line workers and management teams to participate together in the improvement works of work areas, building a safe and healthy working environment.

Japan is known for its heavy work stress, and research institutions in Japan have found that participatory work stress management programmes for employees are effective in improving emotional stress of employees. In light of this, the HKWHC introduced this participatory work stress management workshop for

the first time in November, 2008, and this is already the second time for holding such trainings in Hong Kong. As the response was good for the workshop in 2008, we deliberately lengthened the time of the workshop from the original half day to one whole day, letting Dr. Kazutaka Kogi to have more time to teach and share his many years of training experience with participatory work stress prevention. This workshop attracted 40 participants of different backgrounds, some were representatives from private enterprises, and quite a few were professionals from the medical industry and administrative staff.

Occupational health and safety professional feel that in order to improve the mental health of workers, one must

start from the basis of the problem, thus Dr. Kazutaka Kogi suggests improving the working environment to prevent work stress in employees. The use of the Mental Health Action Checklist is also one of the main points in this workshop. This action checklist is based on scientific methods, designed based on the collection of ideas and actual examples of different fields. It can provide specific guidelines for the participant to evaluate the potential work stress factors in a work area, and also discuss and suggest useful improvement methods. The workshop mainly comprises of the introduction of the action checklist as well as the sharing and group discussions of good work areas and actual examples. These can let the participant experience personally the atmosphere of participatory trainings, and share some low cost improvement suggestions

based on their own work experience in order to lower the level of work stress faced by their employees. Dr. Kazutaka Kogi also stressed the importance of follow-up work in the workshop, and expressed that the improvements must be supported by the management team and employees of the company in order for them to be sustainable and effective.

This workshop continued to receive the support of its participants, and most of them feel that Dr. Kazutaka Kogi's teachings are interesting. They also think that the course materials are just suitable, and that what they have learnt could be used in their work. The HKWHC will promote participatory work stress management training methods to more organizations in future, so as to relieve employee's work stress.



Action Research and Advocacy of Occupational Health of Ethnic Minorities in Hong Kong

Foreword

In Hong Kong, Nepalese and Pakistan citizens do not take up a large proportion of the ethnic minority population. However, they mostly are construction site handymen, moving workers, cleaners or security guards, which all require labour or low skill and will expose them to more severe occupational health problems. We often see news of them involved in work accidents, and the reason behind the accidents (apart from unsafe environment and actions) is often related to the fact that they do not know Chinese and English. Due to the language barrier, employers are unable to make suitable arrangements to let them know about work orders and correct occupational health information. Moreover, the workers themselves seldom reflect and report problems they face when working to their superiors, which will cause danger. The Labour Department and the Occupational Safety and Health Council (OSHC) have published leaflets promoting occupational health and safety in ethnic minority languages, like Pakistan, India and Nepal to let ethnic minority workers get them for free or read them online. However, most ethnic minority workers do not know how and where to get these information, and it is hard for them to get occupational health and safety materials online as they may not have computers at home. Seeing this, the Catholic Diocese of HK Diocesan Pastoral Centre for Workers (Kowloon) and the HKWHC have collaborated to carry out an action research for the occupational health of ethnic minority workers in Hong Kong, “Hong Kong Ethnic Minorities Workers: An Action Research Report on their Occupational Health and Safety”, attempting to do a preliminary exploration of the occupational health and safety situation faced by ethnic minority workers in Hong Kong. Below are the main points from the research report.

Focus of Discussion

Summing up the results from questionnaires and case interviews, the following are a summary of the focus of discussion of this research report.

1. Language Barriers

Respondents and interviewees point out that though some of the companies provide training for occupational health and safety, the trainings are held in Cantonese, thus most of them who do not understand Cantonese do not know what the trainings are about, and the trainings are rendered useless. Some safety officers and project managers have limited English speaking skills, therefore they choose to use Cantonese to tell the workers about occupational health and safety. The workers thus receive very little occupational health and safety information from the safety officers. Another point is that due to language barriers, when the workers face occupational health and safety problems during work, they will not tell their superiors about it.

2. Employers do not carry out their responsibility to provide appropriate training and information of occupational health and safety for their ethnic minority workers

A large proportion of interviewees and respondents express that they did not undergo training before starting work or underwent a very limited amount of training. They mostly depended on their own experience or took other more experienced colleagues as reference. To save resources, some companies do not provide proper training for safe operation of machinery even though the workers need to operate large machines during work. They compress the original 2-day training to a 2-hour training, and do not have clear switch tags on machines, disregarding the safety of workers. Other than not providing proper training, companies do not provide suitable work safety guidelines and personal protection equipment needed.

3. Lack of awareness of occupational health and safety and understanding of employee rights

Respondents and interviewees often get hurt during work because their awareness of occupational health and safety is low, is this is due to the fact that they lack proper occupational health and safety training and do not have work safety guidelines to follow. In this research, a large proportion of respondents and interviewees say that they do not know that Hong Kong has the Occupational Health and Safety Ordinance and Employees' Compensation Ordinance to protect workers. As they do not know the employee rights they should enjoy and in order to earn a living, they will still accept situations where they are being treated unfairly. An example is the workers buying their own facemasks when the employer did not provide them when working in dust-billowing construction sites. If they unfortunately get occupational

injuries, they may not be able to enjoy paid sick leave nor get the compensation they ought to have. There were even cases of ethnic minority workers who force themselves to continue work in order to maintain a living even though doctors do not think they are fit to work. Sometimes, to avoid the troubles an injured worker might bring if he stayed, employers even falsely claim that there is “no work to do” and dismiss a worker. The ethnic minority workers, faced with such unfair treatment, can only suffer in silence and bear with it. They do not seek help from the Labour Department, one reason being that they do not know the services or support the Labour Department provides. Another reason is that they do not believe that the Labour Department can truly help them, and the lengthy and complicated procedures also deter them from fighting for their own rights.

4. Occupational Health and Safety leaflets published by the government in different languages cannot be delivered effectively to workers of ethnic minorities

The Hong Kong Labour Department and the Occupational Safety and Health Council have published occupational health and safety leaflets in different languages such as Pakistan, Nepalese, Indian, Filipino, Indonesian and Thai, which can be obtained free of charge. However, most of the respondents and interviewees say that they had never read related publications from the Hong Kong Labour Department, and only know that the Hong Kong Labour Department is a government body that helps them in finding jobs. They have no idea that the Hong Kong Labour Department also provides information regarding occupational health and safety. In individual case interviews, we further understand why all these leaflets in different languages do not reach the ethnic minority workers. It is because the OSHC relies on the major media in Hong Kong to promote occupational health and safety, including television, radio and newspapers. However, to those ethnic minority workers who do not know Chinese, they mostly would not watch media which is in Chinese, and are even less likely to read newspapers or magazines published in Chinese. They would rather pay to watch channels from their own countries. Other than that, the Hong Kong Labour Department and the OSHC have uploaded occupational health and safety information in different languages on to their website as technology is advanced nowadays, but from interviews we found that some of the ethnic minority workers do not have computers at home, thus seldom go online. They also work hard every day and do not have much spare time, thus seldom get in contact with Chinese media or go online. From this we can see that the occupational health and safety promotion activities carried out by the government via the media cannot effectively deliver the message to them.

5. Ineffective monitoring of the safety situation by the Hong Kong Labour Department

From individual interviews, we can see that many of the employers are not carrying out their basic responsibilities listed in the Occupational Safety and Health

Ordinance to protect the occupational health and safety of their workers, and the Hong Kong Labour Department is weak in monitoring this area of the employers, thus the occupational health and safety of ethnic minority workers are continued to be neglected. This is especially dangerous for workers who need to work with heavy machinery in construction jobs, as very severe accidents could result from workers operating machines without proper safety trainings. Thus there is definitely a need for the Hong Kong Labour Department to strengthen its supervision to guarantee that all operators have received proper and appropriate trainings.

Conclusion

This research explored and got to have a better understanding of the occupational health and safety situation faced by ethnic minority workers in Hong Kong through questionnaires and interviews with working ethnic minority workers. Results from the research show that these workers do not get the occupational health and safety protection they ought to have because of factors such as language barriers and lifestyles, making it harder for them than local workers to receive information on occupational health and safety. Using this research, apart from expressing the request of a safe and healthy working environment for ethnic minority workers, we also hope to raise the awareness of people in society towards their occupational health and safety. As this research only provides a preliminary exploratory understanding of the occupational health and safety situation of ethnic minority workers, we hope that the government and related organizations can take further action to understand and investigate the occupational health and safety of ethnic minority workers based on these results, and actively promote the development of occupational health and safety among them in future to create a safe and healthy working environment for them and a society with racial harmony.



Meeting with Labor department for occupational health protection for minority group in HK

HKWHC's view on the suggestion to ban all asbestos by the Panel on Environmental Affairs of the Legislative Council

The Environmental Protection Department (EPD) submitted a motion in April this year to the Panel on Environmental Affairs of the Legislative Council (hereinafter referred to as the Panel), suggesting to revise the regulation on the banning of import and sales of crocidolite and amosite in the Air Pollution Control Ordinance (Chapter 311, Laws of Hong Kong). They hope that the regulation can be extended to cover other types of asbestos and ban all supply and new use of all types of asbestos.

On the day of the meeting (20th April), committee members present mostly expressed support for the revision, but the government did not have any concrete plan before the meeting. They only mentioned that they would start the preparation work after the meeting, and expect to consult stakeholders and the industry in late June. They also mentioned that they would submit a draft and give an account of the situation to the Legislative Council in the second half of the year, hoping to implement the proposed regulations before the end of 2012.

The HKWHC has been committed to promoting a complete ban on import and use of all type of asbestos in Hong Kong for many years. This revision suggestion submitted by the EPD to the Panel reflects that the

government has also realized the dangers caused by asbestos to the health of people and the inadequacy of the current system. The Centre sent a position paper to the Panel a few days prior to the meeting to express our views and suggestions, and the following is a summary of the paper.

1. The HKWHC supports the banning of import and use of all types of asbestos in Hong Kong. Asbestos, as a recognized carcinogen, has been suggested to be "totally banned" by the World Health Organization long ago. If the Legislative Council can totally ban all use and import of asbestos in Hong Kong in the end, the contact with these dangerous materials of front-line workers and citizens can be further reduced, lowering the risk of getting asbestos-related diseases such as asbestosis or mesothelioma.
2. With the ageing of buildings in Hong Kong and societal development needs, numbers of demolition and reconstruction projects for old buildings have been carried out in recent years, including the \$2.5 million investment in the Operation Building Bright. As a result, asbestos fibres may be released as the construction materials



“For asbestos Ban in Asia” organized by BANKO (Ban Asbestos Network Korea) in Seoul 2008.

containing asbestos may be damaged, which will cause harm to the health of workers and the public. The Centre requests that the government set a well-developed monitoring system to monitor closely the demolishing, renovating and reconstructing projects. They should also carry out asbestos investigations and prepare asbestos investigation reports and abatement plans for the buildings to be worked on before any construction work is carried out. Then other government departments and construction contractors should carry out appropriate arrangements and measures according to the asbestos reports and abatement plans.

3. The Centre suggests that the government should pay more attention to other

industries which use or get in contact with asbestos, and broaden the current monitoring level in order to avoid front line employees or the public getting in contact with asbestos materials through other means and affecting their health.

Although the revision suggestions are only at a primary stage currently, we will still closely follow its progress as the government has already submitted a timeline to the Panel. We strongly hope that the “total ban on asbestos”, the event always advocated by the Centre, can be carried out within its expected period of time, to bring long term protection to the health of front line workers and the public.

For related documents, please see the websites below:

<http://www.legco.gov.hk/yr10-11/english/panels/ea/papers/ea0420cb1-1913-5-e.pdf>(English Version)

“Concern for Asbestos Health Problems of Workers in the Demolition of Old Buildings” Press Conference

The Prevention Team of the Centre held a “Concern for Asbestos Health Problems of Workers in the Demolition of Old Buildings” Press Conference on 28th March 2011, and expressed concern and the need for improvement regarding the occupational health problems brought by asbestos in the demolition and reconstruction projects of old buildings.

In recent years, many demolition and reconstruction projects of old buildings are carried out, thus there is a chance for the asbestos fibres in old buildings to be released and cause harm to the health of workers and the public. On 25th January this year, the HKWHC found and suspected that a construction contractor did not follow legal requirements to properly dispose of construction materials near a reconstruction site in Ngau Tau Kok Estate. Then on 14th February and 16th March, rubble containing asbestos was found disposed on the roadside near a construction site in the Choi Yuen Village Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Express Rail Link, increasing the chances of workers and the public getting asbestosis or mesothelioma due to inhalation of asbestos fibres. In the press conference, the Centre urged the EPD to make appropriate arrangements to deal with the rubble containing asbestos left by the construction works of the Express Rail Link in Choi Yuen Village in order to protect the health of workers and the public. The request to formulate well-developed monitoring systems to closely follow demolition, reconstruction and repair works was also made to the EPD. The Centre also expressed the need to carry out asbestos content assessments for buildings to be worked on, and required the Hong Kong Labour Department to increase its supervision on whether workers use proper qualified protection equipment when demolishing asbestos materials. Health checks for workers involved and the public were also requested to protect the health of workers and affected citizens.

This press conference received coverage from 7 local media, and the Centre hopes and expects that the government will address the issue and make contingency measures and follow-ups as soon as possible. The Centre will also follow up on related issues.

簡介

本港不少地區，特別在舊式樓宇林立的區域例如深水埗、葵青、油尖旺及荃灣等一帶都進行不少裝修維修保養、改建及加建等小型工程。要接觸及監察這類裝修維修工程的安全，預防意外，最有效的方法就是從社區及個人出發，利用緊密的網絡傳播有關高空工作、維修、保養、改建及加建等小型工程的安全知識。因此，職安局聯同勞工處、建造業議會、香港建造商會、香港建造業分包商聯會、香港建造業總工會及香港物業管理公司協會推出一個嶄新的「裝修維修工作安全大使計劃」，協助推廣裝修維修工作安全。

計劃是透過培訓，讓「裝修維修工作安全大使」可以在工作間及社區中協助推廣裝修維修安全知識，特別在社區或日常生活中，若看到裝修維修工程在施工時有不安全狀況或行為時，可以向勞工處通報，預防意外。

「裝修維修工作安全大使」必須要完成一個3.5小時的訓練課程，完成課程後，大使可以學習到裝修維修工作基本安全知識，及如何識別這類工作中不安全行為。



如何成為裝修維修工作安全大使

要成為裝修維修工作安全大使，參加者必須年滿18歲，所有參加者，均須完成「裝修維修工作安全大使」訓練課程，方可獲得委任。

若本身為持有建築工程師資格或曾報讀本局舉辦之「裝修人員的基本安全」課程(*須提供相關證明文件)，則只須參與「裝修維修工作安全大使簡介會」便可以成為「裝修維修工作安全大使」。

「裝修維修工作安全大使」訓練課程

- | | |
|-------------------------|------------|
| 1. 簡介有關裝修及維修工作的職安健法例 | 7. 電力安全 |
| 2. 常見的裝修及維修工作危害 | 8. 化學品安全處理 |
| 3. 搭建、使用及拆卸懸空式棚架的基本安全措施 | 9. 防火安全 |
| 4. 梯具安全 | 10. 個人防護設備 |
| 5. 機器安全操作 | 11. 簡介通報機制 |
| 6. 手工具安全(包括石矢槍、打釘機等) | |

費用 : 免費

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講師 : 專業人士或職安局顧問

授課語言 : 粵語輔以中文講義

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證書頒發 : 學員如出席率達百分之一百及評估合格，可獲頒發證書。

報名表格可於職安局網頁 www.oshc.org.hk 下載 查詢 : 2116 5054 曾穎妍小姐 電郵 : Joan@oshc.org.hk



International Symposium on Work Injury Prevention and Rehabilitation 2012 –

From Work Injury Prevention to Disability Management

26-28 October, 2012

Shanghai Sunshine Rehabilitation Centre,
Songjiang District, Shanghai, China

● Main Themes

- Prevention of Work Injury and Occupational Diseases
- Work Injury Risk Management
- Medical and Occupational Rehabilitation for Work Injuries
- Case Management for Work Injuries

● Organizers



Hong Kong Workers' Health Centre



Guangdong Provincial Work Injury Rehabilitation Centre



Shanghai Sunshine Rehabilitation Centre

● Abstract Submission

You are cordially invited to submit abstracts related to the Conference Theme for oral presentations. All accepted abstracts and papers will be published in the conference proceedings. Please submit your abstract to the Conference Secretariat through email.

Deadline for submission is 31 May, 2012

Conference Secretariat

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