

Employers, contractors and employees should be aware of electrical safety at work during rainstorm

As the rainstorm warning has been issued by the Hong Kong Observatory, the Labour Department (LD) reminds employers and contractors that they should adopt necessary work arrangements and take suitable safety measures to protect the safety of their employees when they are carrying out electrical work or handling electrical plant.

A spokesman for the LD said today (August 11) that employers and contractors should avoid assigning employees to carry out electrical work (like electric arc welding work) or handle electrical plant at places affected by rainstorms, and should refer to the "Code of Practice in times of Typhoons and Rainstorms" and the "Guide on Safety at Work in times of Inclement Weather" issued by the LD.

Even if electrical work is carried out or electrical plant is handled at places not affected by the rainstorm, suitable safety measures must still be adopted to prevent electric shock as the air would be more humid. Such measures include:

- (i) Ensure that all live parts of an electrical installation are isolated from the power supply source and rendered dead, and the isolation from the power supply source must be maintained as long as electrical work is being carried out;
- (ii) Before carrying out any electrical work or handling any electrical plant, cut off and lock out the power supply source, then test the circuit concerned to confirm it is dead and display suitable warning notices, and issue a work permit thereafter;
- (iii) Ensure that protective devices (such as suitable and adequate fuses and circuit breakers) for the electrical installations or electrical plant have been installed and maintained in good working order, and portable electric tools must be double-insulated or properly earthed;
- (iv) Provide suitable personal protective equipment such as insulating gloves and insulating mats for employees; and
- (v) If live electrical work is unavoidable, a comprehensive risk assessment should be conducted by a competent person and the appropriate safety precautions should be taken to remove or properly control the electrical hazards involved before such work can proceed.

In addition, employees should co-operate with the employer or contractor to follow the safety instructions and use the safety equipment provided.

The LD has published guidebooks and leaflets on electrical work safety.

These safety publications are available free from divisional offices of the department or can be downloaded from its website (www.labour.gov.hk/eng/public/content2_8.htm).

Should there be any questions about occupational safety and health matters, please contact the Occupational Safety Officer of the LD at 2559 2297.

Flag-raising ceremony cancelled

Owing to the thunderstorm warning, the flag-raising ceremony to be conducted at Golden Bauhinia Square, Wan Chai at 8am today (August 11) will be cancelled.

Territory-wide flag day today

Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (Hong Kong) Trustees Incorporated has been issued a Public Subscription Permit to hold a territory-wide flag sale from 7am to 12.30pm today (August 11), a spokesman for the Social Welfare Department (SWD) said.

For enquiries, please call the SWD's hotline at 2343 2255, or the Charitable Fund-raising Control Team at 2832 4311 during office hours. Information on the flag days of the month is available at the SWD's website (www.swd.gov.hk/en/index/site_whatsnew/). Permits for flag days containing contact information of the flag-selling organisations and information on the approved flag-selling activities have also been uploaded to the SWD's website (www.swd.gov.hk/en/index/site_pubsvc/page_controlofc/sub_recentlyap/). For enquiries about the detailed flag-selling arrangements, please contact the individual flag-selling organisations.

Details of the charitable fund-raising activities covered by the Public Subscription Permit issued by the SWD have also been uploaded to the GovHK website (www.gov.hk/fundraising).

In the case of suspected fraudulent flag day activities, people should not make any donation and should immediately report the matter to the Police, the spokesman added.

Opening remarks by Under Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs at UN Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination hearing

Following is the translation of the opening remarks by the Under Secretary for Constitutional and Mainland Affairs, Mr Andy Chan, at the hearing in consideration of the 14th to 17th reports of the People's Republic of China under the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination by the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination held today (August 10, Geneva time) in Geneva, Switzerland:

Mr Chairman, Committee members,

I would like to report the implementation of the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (HKSAR) since the last hearing in 2009.

At present, there are some 250 000 people from ethnic minorities (or EMs in short) in Hong Kong. The HKSAR is committed to meeting our obligations under the Convention. We have been taking measures to reinforce protection of individuals against racial discrimination, to provide EMs with equal opportunities and facilitate their integration into our community.

Enhancing support for ethnic minorities in need

Some EMs have encountered difficulties in adaptation and social integration due to language and cultural differences. To enhance collaboration within the HKSAR Government on support for EMs in need, a steering committee chaired by the Chief Secretary for Administration has been set up in 2018 to co-ordinate, review and monitor support for EMs in Hong Kong and a sum of \$500 million has been earmarked in the 2018-19 Budget to strengthen the support services.

Enhancing support for non-Chinese speaking students in learning Chinese language

On education, the HKSAR Government is committed to encouraging and supporting the integration of EM students, into the community, including facilitating their early adaptation to the local education system and mastery of the Chinese language.

At the last hearing, the Committee expressed concern that teaching

Chinese as a second language for non-Chinese speaking (or NCS in short) students with an immigrant background was not adopted as an official education policy in Hong Kong. In this regard, the Education Bureau, in consultation with teachers and language experts, has been implementing the "Chinese Language Curriculum Second Language Learning Framework" in primary and secondary schools since the 2014/15 school year. The "Learning Framework", which is designed from the perspective of second language learners, aims to help NCS students overcome the difficulties in learning Chinese as a second language, with a view to facilitating their effective learning of Chinese and bridging over to mainstream Chinese Language classes as early as possible, and providing them with more opportunities to pursue further studies and careers. Starting from the 2014/15 school year, the Education Bureau has also significantly increased the additional funding to schools to over \$200 million per year at present to facilitate their implementation of the "Learning Framework" and the creation of an inclusive learning environment in schools. In addition, the Education Bureau will continue to step up school-based professional support services and professional development programmes for teachers through diversified modes. At the same time, the Education Bureau has been reviewing the implementation of the "Learning Framework" and further enhancing the teaching strategies, assessment tools and supporting resources for schools as appropriate in a timely manner in the light of the views from various stakeholders and school practices on learning and teaching.

Employment and training

On employment, we attach great importance to providing EMs with equal opportunities in seeking employment. As the largest employer of Hong Kong, the HKSAR Government plays an active role in ensuring that the Chinese language proficiency requirements for all civil service positions are commensurate with their job requirements so that all applicants have opportunities for appointment. In addition, the Labour Department provides dedicated employment services to EM job seekers, and actively promotes their working abilities among employers. The Employees Retraining Board also provides dedicated training courses and support services to meet the career aspirations and training needs of EMs.

Foreign domestic helpers

At the last hearing, the Committee expressed concern over the conditions of employment of foreign domestic helpers (FDHs), the "two-week rule" whereby FDHs have to leave Hong Kong within two weeks upon termination of contract, as well as the "live-in requirement" i.e. all FDHs are required to work and reside in their employers' residence as stated in the Standard Employment Contract. Under our labour laws, FDHs enjoy the same employment rights and protection as local workers in relation to their entitlement to weekly rest days, paid statutory holidays, paid annual leave, sickness allowance, maternity protection, severance payment and long service payment, etc. In addition, FDHs are further protected through the HKSAR Government-prescribed Standard Employment Contract under which they enjoy the Minimum Allowable Wage, free accommodation, free food (or food allowance), free medical care and free passage to/from their places of origin. The aforementioned benefits

are not necessarily available to local workers. As for working hours, there is currently no legislation related to working hours in Hong Kong, and FDHs enjoy the same rights as local workers under the labour laws concerning rest days and other holidays.

The "two-week rule" is necessary for maintaining effective immigration control and helps to prevent FDHs from job-hopping frequently and working illegally in Hong Kong after premature contract termination. It does not preclude FDHs from applying to work in Hong Kong again after returning to their places of origin. The "live-in" requirement forms the cornerstone of the HKSAR's policy of importing FDHs. It has been the our established policy that, as in many other jurisdictions in the world, priority in employment should be given to the local workforce, and importation of workers should only be allowed where there is confirmed manpower shortage in a particular trade that cannot be filled by local workers. In accordance with this principle, FDHs have been imported since the early 1970s to meet the shortfall of local live-in domestic workers. Given that there is no shortage in supply of local non-live-in domestic workers, any change to the "live-in requirement" will go against the rationale for importing FDHs and the fundamental policy that local workers should enjoy priority in employment.

We will continue to strengthen the protection of FDHs. In March 2018, a high-level inter-bureau/departmental steering committee with the Chief Secretary for Administration as its chairman promulgated the "Action Plan to Tackle Trafficking in Persons and to Enhance Protection of Foreign Domestic Helpers in Hong Kong" to steer the work of the HKSAR Government in this aspect.

Non-refoulement claimants

We have been operating the unified screening mechanism since March 2014 to screen non-refoulement claims on all applicable grounds. Procedures of the unified screening mechanism meet high standards of fairness required by law, including the provision of publicly funded legal assistance as well as interpretation and translation services to all claimants. Claimants aggrieved by the Immigration Department's decision may lodge an appeal with the impartial Appeal Board. The estimated expenditure on the screening of non-refoulement claims, including expenditure on various support services provided to the claimants, is about \$1.4 billion in 2018-19 which represents an increase of 159 per cent over that of 2014-15.

Integration into the community

We believe that public education and support services are crucial to facilitate better integration of EMs into the community. For many years, we have implemented an array of measures to promote racial harmony and facilitate the integration of EMs into the community. The Home Affairs Department renders dedicated services and programmes for them through district networks, including commissioning non-governmental organisations to operate six support services centres and two sub-centres for them to provide various tailor-made learning classes, integration activities and counselling services; funding two community support teams, i.e. the Nepalese Community

Support Team and the Pakistani Community Support Team, to offer integration services through members of their own communities; and launching district-based integration programmes and the Ethnic Minority Ambassador Schemes. Furthermore, the Committee on the Promotion of Racial Harmony continues to advise the Government on matters relating to fostering racial harmony and facilitating the use of public service by EMs. The Ethnic Minorities Forum also provides a channel of communication between the Government and EM communities and the organisations dedicated to serving them.

Discrimination law review

On legislation, the HKSAR Government is actively following up on the Discrimination Law Review report submitted by the Equal Opportunities Commission in 2016 and will put forward proposals to the Legislative Council within this year. We will take forward eight recommendations of higher priority, of which six are related to the Race Discrimination Ordinance, such as expanding the scope of protection from racial discrimination from a person's "near relative" like spouse and children, to "associate" such as a carer or a colleague; and prohibiting discrimination by "imputation" that a person is of a particular racial group.

Closing remarks

Mr Chairman, distinguished members, the HKSAR Government seeks to provide EMs with equal opportunities through enhancing legislation as well as education, employment and training, community participation and other support services, so that they can fully integrate into Hong Kong, realise their potential and contribute to Hong Kong's success. Over the years, we have taken steps to promote racial harmony and equality. We will continue to make our best endeavours in this respect.

ENB meets with trade representatives on PRS on Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment

The Environment Bureau (ENB) and the Environmental Protection Department (EPD) today (August 10) met with representatives of relevant retail trade associations of home electrical appliances to review the implementation of the Producer Responsibility Scheme on Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment (WPRS). The meeting was chaired by the Under Secretary for the Environment, Mr Tse Chin-wan.

At the meeting, the trade representatives commented that since the implementation of the scheme, the WEEE€\$PARK operator had been able to

collect the used equipment three working days from the day of sales after receipt of the service request from the sellers and as requested by the customer. Delivery of the new product and removal of the used one could be done on the same day. The EPD also reminded sellers to strengthen training for their frontline staff. They have to explain clearly to the customers the arrangements for statutory removal service and the time required, and should not make any false claims or arrangements that are inconsistent with the law.

The meeting also discussed other aspects of the implementation including how to strengthen the collaboration between different stakeholders. The EPD reminded the trade that providing collection service for used equipment does not require a licence. Sellers can choose and appoint different logistics companies to be the default collector under their removal service plans, and they are not obliged to appoint the WEEE&PARK operator as their default collector.

An EPD spokesman said, "We appreciate that the logistics service market is mature and many sellers have their own logistics fleet or partnering logistics services companies to handle delivery and collection services. The new scheme is designed to enable sellers to continue their existing practice of using their own fleet or different logistics companies to provide collection service for delivery to qualified treatment facilities for further processing. We welcome the trade to explore with the qualified treatment facilities the feasibility of collaboration in providing the removal service."

Following commencement of the legislation, the EPD has commenced its enforcement efforts including inspections at shops suspected of non-compliance. As at 4pm today, the EPD has conducted over 340 inspections at relevant points of sales and the overall compliance situation is satisfactory. If members of the public have any questions or complaints on the implementation of the WPRS, they can call the EPD's dedicated hotline 2310 0223.

Regulated electrical equipment includes air-conditioners, refrigerators, washing machines, televisions, computers, printers, scanners and monitors. The WPRS covering these products commenced operation on August 1 this year.

Representatives from three trade associations, namely the Hong Kong and Kowloon Electrical Appliances Merchants Association, Radio Association of Hong Kong, and the Hong Kong Retail Management Association, attended the meeting today to discuss mainly the implementation of the WPRS at the retail supply level. Representatives of the WEEE&PARK operator were also present. The ENB and EPD will continue to meet with the relevant trade from time to time to review the implementation of the scheme.