

Labour Department highly concerned about fatal work accident that happened today

The Labour Department (LD) is highly concerned about a work accident that happened at a construction site in Tsuen Wan this afternoon (May 8), in which a male worker fell from the upper level of a bamboo scaffold at the external wall of a building under renovation. He was certified dead later in the hospital. The LD is saddened by the death of the worker and expresses its deepest sympathies to the victim's family.

The LD's spokesman said, "We commenced an immediate on-site investigation as soon as we were notified of the accident and will issue suspension notices to the contractors concerned, suspending the use, erection, alteration and dismantling of the bamboo scaffold, and related lifting work. The contractors cannot resume the work process until the LD is satisfied that measures to abate the relevant risk have been taken."

The spokesman added, "We will complete investigation as soon as possible to identify the cause of the accident, ascertain the liability of the duty holders and recommend improvement measures. We will take actions pursuant to the law if there is any violation of the work safety legislation."

The general duty provisions of the Factories and Industrial Undertakings Ordinance require employers to provide safe working environments, plant and safe systems of work for their employees. Those who contravene the above provisions are liable to a maximum fine of \$500,000 and imprisonment for six months.

In regard to today's accident, the LD will issue a Work Safety Alert through its website and email, giving a brief account of the accident concerned to duty holders, workers' unions, professional bodies of safety practitioners and others, reminding the industry of the importance of following safety precautionary measures to prevent a recurrence of similar accidents.

The LD will also remind the employer concerned of the liability for employees' compensation under the Employees' Compensation Ordinance, assist family members of the deceased to claim employees' compensation and closely follow up on the case. For those with financial difficulties, the LD will assist them to apply for appropriate emergency funds. Subject to the needs and wishes of family members of the deceased, the LD will also liaise with the Social Welfare Department for financial or other assistance.

For the sake of securing the safety and health of employees at work, the LD appeals to employers to provide plant and systems of work that are safe and without risks to health. Employees should co-operate with their employers, adopt all safety measures and use personal protective equipment

provided properly to avoid endangering their own work safety and that of other workers.

CHP investigates suspected poisoning case after consumption of medicinal plant

The Centre for Health Protection (CHP) of the Department of Health today (May 8) announced that it is investigating a suspected case of poisoning related to consumption of medicinal plant, and urged members of the public not to collect or consume any unknown plants from parks or the countryside as they may be poisonous.

The case involving a 46-year-old woman who developed dizziness, facial numbness and blurred vision after taking self-prepared broth containing a medicinal plant, *Cassytha Filiformis*, that she collected while hiking in Cloudy Hill, Tai Po in late April. A friend of the patient who went hiking with her also picked the plant and self-prepared broth with the same plant and had similar symptoms.

The case sought medical treatment and was admitted to Kwong Wah Hospital on May 2. She was discharged on the same day in stable condition. Her friend sought medical treatment from a private doctor and was stable requiring no hospitalisation.

A CHP spokesman said tests of the unused plants and the case's urine sample by the Hospital Authority Toxicology Reference Laboratory revealed the presence of substances including gelsemium alkaloids.

"*Cassytha Filiformis* usually does not contain gelsemium alkaloids. However, it is a creeping plant which parasitizes on other plants for survival. If it parasitizes on *Gelsemium elegans*, it may absorb gelsemium alkaloids and becomes toxic," the spokesman said. The investigation into this case is on-going.

The spokesman reminded members of the public, especially hikers, to refrain from collecting plants, including their fruits, roots and stems, in the countryside as many of them may contain lethal natural toxins. If they feel unwell after consumption, they should seek advice from healthcare professionals immediately.

Meetings of Legislative Council and its Committees

The following is issued on behalf of the Legislative Council Secretariat:

Details of the meetings of the Legislative Council (LegCo) and its Committees to be held in the LegCo Complex during the week from May 11 to 15 are available in the meeting schedule attached.

The information in the meeting schedule is subject to change. Please refer to the "LegCo Calendar" on the LegCo Website (www.legco.gov.hk) for the latest details of meetings.

Members of the public can watch or listen to the meetings via the "Webcast" system on the LegCo Website. To observe the proceedings of the meetings at the LegCo Complex, members of the public may call 3919 3399 during office hours to reserve seats.

Hong Kong Customs seizes suspected smuggled frozen meat (with photos)

Hong Kong Customs yesterday (May 7) detected a suspected smuggling case using a barge in the waters off Lung Kwu Chau. About 144 tonnes of suspected smuggled frozen meat with an estimated market value of about \$5 million were seized.

Customs officers spotted a suspicious barge when conducting an anti-smuggling operation in the waters off Lung Kwu Chau yesterday evening. Customs officers took immediate action and seized the batch of suspected smuggled frozen meat on board the barge.

In the operation, nine men on board the barge suspected to be connected with the case, aged between 27 and 56, were arrested.

Investigation is ongoing.

Smuggling is a serious offence. Under the Import and Export Ordinance, any person found guilty of importing or exporting unmanifested cargo is liable to a maximum fine of \$2 million and imprisonment for seven years.

Members of the public may report any suspected smuggling activities to Customs' 24-hour hotline 2545 6182 or its dedicated crime-reporting email account (crimereport@customs.gov.hk).



Red tides sighted

Four red tides have been sighted over the past week, an inter-departmental red tide working group reported today (May 8).

The first red tide was spotted by a member of the public on May 2 at West Lamma Channel, including Lo Tik Wan and Sok Kwu Wan fish culture zones. The second red tide was spotted by staff of the Leisure and Cultural Services Department at Golden Beach, Tuen Mun, on May 3.

In addition, staff of the Marine Department and the Environmental Protection Department spotted red tides at Victoria Harbour near China Ferry Terminal and Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre on May 4 and 5 respectively.

All four red tides have dissipated and no associated fish deaths have been reported so far.

A spokesman for the working group said, "All four red tides were formed by *Heterosigma akashiwo*, which is commonly found in Hong Kong waters. According to overseas literature, *Heterosigma akashiwo* might produce neurotoxins and kill fish by damaging their gills."

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) urged mariculturists at the Ma Wan, Cheung Sha Wan, Lo Tik Wan and Sok Kwu Wan fish culture zones to monitor the situation closely and increase aeration where necessary.

Red tide is a natural phenomenon. The AFCD's proactive phytoplankton monitoring programme will continue to monitor red tide occurrences to minimise the impact on the mariculture industry and the public.