

**ANTICIPATED Q&As ON IMMEDIATE REQUIREMENT FOR
ENHANCED & SAFE WORKING CONDITIONS BEFORE FDWS
ALLOWED TO CLEAN WINDOW EXTERIORS**

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Rationale for Enhanced Safe Working Conditions

1. Why is the Government introducing tighter rules on FDWs cleaning window exteriors?

- Window cleaning has been the major reason for FDW fatal falls. Both employers and FDWs themselves must be responsible for the safety of FDWs when doing domestic work. The tighter rules were introduced to ensure employers treat this responsibility seriously, and take steps to prevent further unnecessary loss of lives.
- Most stakeholders MOM engaged during our consultations also called for the government to require that FDWs should not be allowed to clean window exteriors, unless there was adult supervision and window grilles were closed and locked.

2. Some windows don't have grilles. Why can't an FDW clean the window exteriors as long as she is supervised and uses an extendable wiper, for example?

- The enhanced safe working conditions are intended to **minimise the risk of falls from heights from cleaning window exteriors as much as possible, short of banning the chore.**
- During the Settling-in Programme that all new FDWs have to go through, FDWs are taught to clean window exteriors with the window grilles locked. If there are no grilles present, or grilles are opened, the risk of falling is much higher.

3. Why is supervision required if the window grilles are to be closed and locked too?

- FDWs may still be careless and forget to follow safety requirements (e.g. closed and locked grilles) strictly. It only takes a moment while cleaning a hard-to-reach area with unlocked window grilles for an FDW to lose her balance and fall.
- Supervision is required to ensure that the safe working conditions are in

place at all times while the chore is being carried out.

4. There have been FDW deaths from hanging laundry as well. Why is MOM only introducing tighter requirements for window cleaning?

- We treat falls from hanging laundry just as seriously, but the solutions are not as clear cut as the cleaning of window exteriors. It would be more difficult for employers to supervise their FDWs each time they hang their laundry out to dry (which typically happens more frequently than window cleaning). Instead, employers must take steps to minimise risks. Employers should ensure their new FDWs are fully able to safely perform tasks where they risk falling from heights, including hanging laundry, before allowing them to do so on their own e.g. by supervising or guiding them. They should also remind their FDWs that they **must not overload the pole** with too many clothes, and **must not stand on an elevated platform or tip toe** while handling the poles.

5. Why is MOM not applying these same requirements to local domestic workers/locals as well?

- We strongly urge anyone who performs household chores that may put themselves at risk of falls from heights to also follow these same safety requirements. FDW employers and members of the public can refer to safety tips at MOM's website at <http://www.mom.gov.sg/statistics-publications/others/publications/Pages/workpass-fdw.aspx>.
- Many FDWs do not come from high-rise environments and may not be used to the urban living environment in Singapore. Given that they are therefore likely to be unaware of the risks in a high-rise domestic setting, employers need to play a more active role to ensure their FDWs' safety.

Employers Concerns

6. What if my FDW cleans the window exteriors in my absence without my permission or instruction? Would I be held responsible for not adhering to the enhanced safe working conditions (which requires supervision)?

- If an FDW is found cleaning window exteriors without the enhanced &

safe working conditions in place, MOM will conduct thorough investigations to ascertain the facts of the case and decide on the appropriate course of action.

- Employers who want their FDWs to clean window exteriors should at least inform their FDWs about the tightened safety requirements and regularly reiterate these requirements to them.
- MOM will also be educating FDWs, for example through the Settling-in Programme, that they should not clean window exteriors unless the enhanced safe working conditions are in place.

7. What exactly does “supervision” entail? Do I have to hold on to her, for example?

- Supervision is required so that one more party is present to ensure that the safe working conditions are in place at all times while the chore is being carried out.
- In addition to making sure that the window grilles are closed and locked, you should keep a close watch on the FDW cleaning the window exterior to make sure that her safety is not compromised at any point in time. For example, she should not be allowed to open the window grilles even for a moment to clean a hard-to-reach area.

8. What does MOM consider an “adult representative”? Can my teenage child or elderly parent supervise the FDW in my stead?

- If the employer is not physically present to supervise the FDW, the employer’s adult representative should (i) know the required safe working conditions and (ii) be in a position of authority to make sure the FDW carries out the chore in a safe manner. This includes being able to stop the FDW if she wants to unlock the grilles to clean a hard-to-reach area.

9. Can my FDW clean the window exteriors without my supervision/without the grilles closed & locked if I make her use a safety harness?

- No, wearing a safety harness may give the FDW a false sense of security and encourage her to engage in unsafe behaviour, e.g. climbing out to

clean the window.

- Furthermore, for a safety harness to be effective (i) the FDW must be trained to put it on properly and (ii) it must be attached to a secure anchor. In order to arrest the falls, such secure anchors must be capable of supporting the forces generated by a fallen person. (About 22.2kN per person attached to the equipment). The typical window grille, without proper testing, would not serve as a good anchor.
- Even with a safety harness, persons falling from height could suffer physical and emotional trauma.

Penalties and Enforcement

10. Why doesn't MOM just enhance penalties and enforcement (instead of requiring the enhanced safe working conditions to be met)?

- MOM intends to raise the penalty for employers prosecuted for failing to provide FDWs with a safe working environment and ensure their FDWs perform their duties according to the safe work practices stipulated by MOM. We intend to raise the maximum penalties from the current \$5,000 fine and/or six months' jail to a \$10,000 fine and/or 12 months' jail, as part of the ongoing review of the Employment of Foreign Manpower Act and its subsidiary legislation later this year.
- The enhanced safe working conditions were intended to minimise the risks of falls from heights as far as possible, by requiring the active responsibility of employers and FDWs. Enhanced penalties and enforcement alone may not achieve this and must go hand in hand with stricter safety requirements and education.

Education and Training

11. Why doesn't MOM just dedicate more time training and educating FDWs and employers on safety (instead of requiring the enhanced safe working conditions to be met)?

- MOM has put extensive educational measures in place to ensure FDW safety and will continue in our efforts to reach out to employers and FDWs on this matter. However, employers and FDWs may still be

careless and forget to follow the safety guidelines.

- The enhanced safe working conditions were intended to minimise the risks of falls from heights as far as possible, by requiring the active responsibility of both employers and FDWs. Safety education alone may not achieve this and must go hand in hand with strict safety requirements and enforcement.

(For Info: Existing Educational Measures)

First-time FDW employers and FDWs are already educated on safe work practices through the online or classroom Employers' Orientation Programme (EOP) as well as the 1-day Settling-In Programme (SIP) for new FDWs that started on 1 May 2012.

*In the SIP, FDWs receive **verbal and practical instruction in their native languages** on how to perform household chores safely, especially cleaning windows and hanging laundry. They are also each given a handy guide and safety pamphlet (in English and their native language) with pictures of the safety Dos and Don'ts. Under the new SIP, we have increased the emphasis and time spent on the safety messages. SIP trainers will note down their observations of each FDW during the practical component. If trainers observe that the new FDW is having difficulties doing certain household chores safely, these points will be shared with the FDWs' employment agencies and their new employers.*

Operational Issues

12. My flat has an external parapet that is X meters wide outside the windows, and we can walk safely on the parapet. Would it be OK for my FDW to step outside to clean the windows in such an instance?

- No, FDWs should not step out onto parapets to clean exterior windows. Exterior windows should be cleaned from inside of the house with adherence to the enhanced safe working conditions.
- If the window exteriors cannot be cleaned without the enhanced safety guidelines being met, it should not be done. MOM will conduct thorough investigations to ascertain the facts of the case and decide on the appropriate course of action. It is not worth risking the FDW falling while

cleaning window exteriors.

- When MOM spoke to local cleaning companies, they explained that their workers understand they are not obliged to clean window exteriors that are difficult to reach even with extendable cleaning tools.

13. My windows open out onto my balcony, is it ok for my FDW to clean them?

- If the balcony is designed such that it is in effect similar to a common corridor, thus enabling the FDW to clean exterior windows from within the building (i.e. the FDW does not have to climb out of the window onto the balcony or parapet), the FDW may clean the window exteriors without the enhanced safe working conditions in place.

14. If my windows are pivot-able/swivel windows, can I ask my FDW to swing the windows in to clean the window exteriors?

- If the window exteriors can be cleaned from inside the house such that the FDW does not have to extend her arm or lean her body beyond the windowsill, the FDW may clean the window exteriors without the enhanced safe working conditions in place. However, this must be done without the FDW standing on any elevated platform.
- If the window exteriors cannot be cleaned without the enhanced safety guidelines being met, it should not be done. MOM will conduct thorough investigations to ascertain the facts of the case and decide on the appropriate course of action. It is not worth risking the FDW falling while cleaning window exteriors.
- When MOM spoke to local cleaning companies, they explained that their workers understand they are not obliged to clean window exteriors that are difficult to reach even with extendable cleaning tools.

15. I live in landed property. Do I still have to abide by the new safety requirements?

- Yes, as long as there are windows above the ground level, you are not

allowed to have your FDW clean the exteriors of the windows unless the two safe working conditions are in place.

16. If I need my FDW to clean the windows along common corridors in my flat, do I still have to abide by the new safety requirements?

- No, the new safe working conditions need not be in place as FDWs are able to safely clean the exteriors of windows along common corridors from within the building.