

# Govt will act if bosses disregard workers' health

By FENGZENKUN

EMPLOYERS who flout the Government's health advisories for the haze could be penalised, Acting Manpower Minister Tan Chuan-Jin warned yesterday.

"If employers do not follow the advisory and are wantonly disregarding the safety and health of their workers, action will be taken. Our inspectors will go out to inspect and we will follow up on feedback provided," he said.

Speaking to reporters at Chai Chee where grassroots organisations were distributing face masks to residents, Mr Tan said some irresponsible actions include expecting crane operators to hoist heavy loads when visibility is bad.

"If the conditions are such that outdoor workers are expected to work with masks, we expect that to be adhered to. If there are circumstances where they are not, that's something we need to follow up on with the companies," he added.

Mr Tan also spelt out avenues of help for employees who feel their health is being threatened: "We encourage workers to take it up with the unions, their supervisors, with management.

"If they can't find a solution or they are worried or afraid, call us and that's something we'll look into and address as best we can."

Mr Tan added that the Man-

power Ministry is working with the Ministry of Health to make sure companies have enough face masks for their employees.

"Those who need them can call in and we will make the arrangements and push it out to them," he said.

Asked whether the Manpower Ministry would consider stopping work for specific groups such as outdoor construction workers when the three-hour Pollutant Standards Index crosses a threshold, Mr Tan reiterated that the Government is basing its health advice on the 24-hour forecast.

"I know that when we see the PSI spike and the haze is particularly thick we tend to get panicky, and that's perfectly understandable... but it's the cumulative effect (of) exposure over the course of a day that has the real impact," he said.

That being said, firms also need to be flexible. "Employers do remain responsible to exercise their discretion and adjust their work practices based on the prevailing circumstances," he said.

Workers can call the Manpower Ministry's call centre on 6438-5122, and if there are significant safety concerns on outdoor work during the haze situation, they can call the ministry's safety hotline on 6317-1111 or e-mail

[oshd@mom.gov.sg](mailto:oshd@mom.gov.sg).

✉ [zengkun@sph.com.sg](mailto:zengkun@sph.com.sg)