

MOM crackdown on bug-infested dorms

Ministry steps up checks on housing violations, takes action against firms

By EUGENE CHUA

RATS, cockroaches, bed bugs running wild – would you want to live in such abysmal conditions?

Some employers do subject their foreign workers to such living conditions, and the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) is cracking down on them.

It said yesterday that it conducted around 300 inspections and took action against 428 employers for housing violations in just the first four months of this year. This is almost half of the 1,062 employers who were dealt with in the whole of last year.

Offenders were either warned, offered composition or charged in court. Violators are liable to a fine

of up to \$10,000 and/or 12 months' imprisonment for each offence.

MOM's latest case involved five companies – Soon Aik Marine Engineering, Soon Aik Offshore, Soon Aik Shipbuilding, Yong Soon Shipbuilding and Yong Soon Marine Engineering.

On Tuesday, they were convicted for failing to provide acceptable accommodation for their foreign workers, as well as failing to update the workers' addresses, and failing to pay salaries on time. They pleaded guilty to 44 charges overall and were fined \$80,000 in total.

In addition, the five companies will be barred for an undisclosed duration by the MOM from hiring

new foreign workers or renewing the work passes of existing workers.

This is the first prosecution case against housing offences this year.

Inspections conducted on April 12 last year revealed that the premises in Tuas where the companies' foreign workers were living were not authorised for dormitory use.

The dormitory was overcrowded and dirty. Besides overflowing rubbish bins, infestations of rats, cockroaches and bed bugs, and insufficient toilets, there was also no proper emergency exit route.

The companies were ordered to relocate the affected workers to approved accommodation immediately after the inspections.

They were slapped with 218 charges, of which 174 were taken into consideration during sentencing.



Shower facilities in a deplorable state in a foreign workers' dormitory. On Tuesday, five companies were found guilty of failing to provide acceptable accommodation for their foreign workers and other violations. PHOTO: MINISTRY OF MANPOWER

MOM says it will continue to clamp down on employment law violations.

The number of inspections to detect violations of the Employment Act, which governs how

workers are paid, will be increased tenfold, from around 500 a year to 5,000.

Inspections against housing violations will also be intensified. Members of the public who

have information can alert the ministry by sending details to mom_fmmd@mom.gov.sg.

All information will be kept strictly confidential. ceugene@sph.com.sg