

Enforcement Ops following New Work at Heights Regulations

In May 2013, the new Workplace Safety and Health (WSH) (Work at Heights) Regulations came into force. In the same month, the Ministry of Manpower (MOM) commenced the first Work at Heights-focussed enforcement operation since the new regulations took effect. The exercise, which will be completed in July 2013, will focus on workplaces in northern Singapore.

2 The enforcement operation targets high-risk sectors such as Construction, Marine and Manufacturing, and covers all safety regulations, in particular, the new WSH (Work at Heights) Regulations. Key requirements which only come into force next year, including the implementation of a Fall Prevention Plan (FPP)¹ and Permit to Work System (PTW)², are also highlighted during the inspections.

Work at Heights violations uncovered

3 To date, MOM's Occupational Safety and Health Inspectorate has conducted almost 300 surprise workplace inspections. A total of 107 Work at Heights violations were uncovered. MOM issued eight worksites with Stop Work Orders and instructed occupiers of these worksites to rectify safety lapses. MOM's officers conduct an on-site inspection to ensure that these lapses are rectified before work can resume at these sites.

- a. 43 fines totalling about \$25,000 were issued during the operation.
- b. The majority of WAH-related safety lapses identified were from worksites in the construction (77%) and manufacturing (12%) sectors.
- c. Of the worksites inspected, 22 failed to implement Risk Assessment for WAH.

Implementation of PTW & FPP

4 22% of the inspected worksites implemented PTW and FPP voluntarily, to prepare for the mandatory requirements which will take effect on 1 May 2014.

¹ Fall Prevention Plan (FPP) – A specific provision mandates the establishment and implementation of a FPP in accordance with any Approved Code of Practice issued by the WSH Council. This provision will only come into effect on 1 May 2014 to allow the industry time to build up their capability.

² Permit-to-work System (PTW) – A specific provision pertaining to the control of work at height where a person could fall from a height of more than three metres. This will also come into effect on 1 May 2014 to allow industry time to have people trained and qualified to implement the PTW system.

Common WAH Safety Lapses Persist

5 For the construction and marine worksites, the WAH safety lapses identified during the inspections include:

- a. Unsecured openings without barricades,
- b. Lack of proper access to and from work areas, and
- c. Unsafe scaffolds.

6 For the manufacturing worksites, the WAH safety lapses include:

- a. Open sides with a lack of barriers at the sides of mezzanine floors and staircases
- b. Improper access, especially the usage of ladders in poor working condition (Please see **Appendix I** for photos of common safety lapses.)

7 Open sides without proper barricades and lack of safe access are common safety lapses in falling accidents, where workers could suffer serious injuries or even lose their lives at work. Lack of proper housekeeping also lead to slip-and-trip injuries when workers trip over debris on the ground.

8 Following a hierarchy of preferred control measures, companies should first consider if work at heights can be avoided. If not, safer work methods such as scaffolds over tall ladders, accompanied with proper barricades for open sides, should be considered. Adopting methods which require the use of Personal Protective Equipment (such as wearing a safety harness, with lifelines) should be the last resort.

Work at Heights remains a key priority

9 As Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Manpower Mr Hawazi Daipi announced during the Programme-based Engagement (ProBE) Plus industry forum on 4 April 2013, working safely at heights remains a key priority area in the national drive towards zero accidents.

10 Mr. Suresh Navaratnam, Director, Policy, Information and Corporate Services, Occupational Safety and Health Division said, "While our efforts saw a modest reduction in the number of fall-related fatalities last year, surprise inspections still continue to uncover common safety lapses which were contributory factors in past fatal accidents. MOM would like to remind employers to take all reasonably practicable measures to ensure that workers' safety and health are protected. MOM will continue to step up enforcement operations to stamp out unsafe work at heights, while sustaining our efforts to engage employers and assisting them to comply with the regulations."

Errant Occupiers and Employers Will Be Taken to Task

11 Under the WSH Act, companies that fail to ensure workplace safety may be fined up to \$500,000 for the first offence. Individuals can also be fined up to \$200,000 and/or imprisoned up to 24 months for offences under the Act. MOM officers may issue Stop Work Orders to occupiers of workplaces if there is an immediate danger to the safety and health of workers.

Appendix I: Summary and photos of common safety lapses



Unsecured openings without barricades



Lack of proper access to and from work areas



Unsafe scaffolds



Open sides with a lack of barriers at the sides of mezzanine floors and staircases