
Workplace Safety: A Daunting Task in Malaysia, Says Expert

Description

Accidents are rampant. Foreign workers, unaware of safety protocols, often neglect to use safety equipment. This is a concern.

In Petaling Jaya, despite the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Act 1994's amendments, including the introduction of a workplace safety coordinator, maintaining consistent safety standards across all sectors remains a challenge.

Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye, chairman of the Alliance For A Safe Community, emphasizes the importance of fostering a safety culture in the workplace. It should be a core element of organizational values and daily practices, he says.

“Employers shape their organizations’ culture,” he states. “This includes fostering a safe workplace. Key decision-makers within the organization need to embrace and practice safety for a safety culture to be effectively developed and sustained.”

The Social Security Organisation reported a staggering 41,278 work-related accidents between January and June, just last Monday.

Steven Sim, the Human Resources Minister, revealed that 52.5% or 21,508 cases were industrial accidents.

Lee pointed out that the construction and manufacturing sectors have seen the highest number of workplace accidents in recent years. The attitudes of foreign workers, who make up the majority of the workforce, are a significant issue.

“These workers have minimal knowledge about safety and health,” he explains. “They are provided with personal protective equipment, such as safety helmets, shoes, and harnesses. However, they often choose not to use them since they come from countries where there is little exposure to such equipment.”

He stressed the importance for contractors employing these workers to ensure SOP and safety procedures are followed at the work site.

In the manufacturing sector, particularly within small and medium enterprises (SMEs), the main challenges revolve around the need for improved safety standards.

“Safety standards in SMEs are often insufficiently understood and implemented,” he says. “Ensuring safety at the workplace requires significant investment, which many SMEs are reluctant to make. Since SMEs contribute to more than 85% of the country’s economic growth, ensuring the safety and health of employees in these workplaces is critical.”

Datuk Syed Hussain Syed Husman, president of the Malaysian Employers Federation (MEF), said that

according to the Statistics Department National Accident Report for 2022, the most common types of industrial accidents were those involving stepping on, striking against or being struck by objects, including falling objects, which accounted for 8,522 cases.

He listed 7,944 cases as falls involving individuals, 5,199 as other types of accidents, 4,750 as overexertion or strenuous movements, and 4,197 as workers being caught in or between objects.

“Employers should self-regulate the law and implement best practices, developing a generative safety culture,” he advises. “Management at all levels must lead by example, ensure OSH resources are available, and maintain regular communication with regulatory bodies.”

He said MEF advocates that employers comply with the OSH Act 1994, including establishing an OSH policy, appointing a safety and health officer, conducting continuous hazard monitoring through risk assessments and controls, and fostering a safety and health culture.

“Employees must take responsibility for their own safety and adhere to safety guidelines,” he adds. “While the government and employers can implement security measures, it is the employees who are the primary users of these measures. It is a collective effort to save lives and losing one is a significant loss to the country, employers, and families.”

CATEGORY

1. Malaysia

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