

Chapter 6

Employment

Hong Kong's workforce is intelligent, adaptable and hardworking — qualities the Government helps maintain by facilitating employment, safeguarding workers' rights and benefits, ensuring workplaces are safe and healthy, and promoting harmonious employer-employee relationships.

Hong Kong's hard working, adaptable workforce is one of its most treasured assets. The Government spares no effort in ensuring that Hong Kong workers stay motivated and skilful to contribute to the city's economic competitiveness. Notwithstanding the continued improvement of the labour market in 2011, there are challenges lurking in the uncertain global economic situation. The Government adopts a multi-pronged strategy to meet these challenges. This includes upgrading workers' skills to make them more employable and competitive, improving the business environment, introducing measures to create jobs and enhancing labour market efficiency.

During 2011, the Employees Retraining Board offered over 130 000 training places to help in-service workers to upgrade their skills, and those seeking job change and the unemployed to re-enter the labour market. The Government also continued to offer special help to the less competitive workers.

The Labour Department has introduced a series of market-oriented employment initiatives for job seekers. These include the Employment Programme for the Middle-aged, the Work Trial Scheme, the Pilot Employment Navigator Programme, the Youth Pre-employment Training Programme and Youth Work Experience and Training Scheme, the Youth Employment Start, and the Work Orientation and Placement Scheme for job seekers with disabilities. Job fairs are also organised to help job seekers to enter or re-enter the job market.

The Government promotes harmonious employer-employee relations, protects the rights and improves the benefits of employees in line with Hong Kong's socio-economic development, as well as guards the safety, and protects the health of employees at work.

Labour Market Situation

Hong Kong's labour force comprised 3.7 million people in 2011 — 52.5 per cent men and 47.5 per cent women, representing a rise of 2 per cent over 2010.

The majority, or 88.5 per cent, of people employed were in the service sectors: 31.8 per cent in the import/export, wholesale and retail trades, and accommodation (covering hotels, guesthouses, boarding houses and other establishments providing short-term accommodation) and food services; 25.9 per cent in public administration, and social and personal services; 19.3 per cent in financing and insurance, real estate, and professional and business services; and 11.5 per cent in transportation, storage, postal and courier services, and information and communications. Only 3.2 per cent worked in the manufacturing sector.

Employment Situation

The labour market showed further improvement in 2011. The overall unemployment rate fell from 4.3 per cent in 2010 to 3.4 per cent in 2011, while the underemployment rate also declined from 2 per cent in 2010 to 1.7 per cent in 2011. Total employment rose by about 102 300, from 3 474 100 in 2010 to 3 576 400 in 2011.

Employment Earnings

In 2011, 12.6 per cent of people with jobs were earning less than \$5,000 a month, while the percentage of people earning \$30,000 and above was 14.9. The median monthly employment earnings rose by \$300 from \$11,000 in 2010 to \$11,300 in 2011. In 2011, the median monthly employment earnings for higher skilled workers such as managers and administrators, professionals and associate professionals was \$22,000, while those with lower skills was \$8,500.

Wages

Owing to buoyant labour demand and implementation of a statutory minimum wage, wage rates as measured by Nominal Wage Index for workers up to supervisory level increased by 9.4 per cent between December 2010 and December 2011. After discounting changes in consumer prices, wage rates showed an increase of 3.9 per cent in real terms.

Labour Administration and Services

The Labour Department is headed by the Commissioner for Labour. It formulates and implements labour policies; enforces labour legislation, provides free employment services to employers and job seekers; promotes harmonious labour relations and responsible trade unionism; safeguards employees' rights and benefits; and promotes the occupational safety, health and welfare of the workforce.

Labour Legislation

The Labour Department administers Hong Kong's labour laws. Labour legislation, supplemented by administrative measures, provides the basis for the

enforcement of the rights and obligations of employers and employees, and in so doing, also enables Hong Kong to meet internationally-accepted labour standards.

A statutory minimum wage of \$28 per hour was introduced for the first time in Hong Kong on May 1, 2011 to forestall excessively low wages of the grassroots workforce.

There were 4 965 prosecutions for breaches of various ordinances and regulations administered by the Labour Department in 2011. These resulted in fines totalling more than \$17 million.

International Labour Affairs

Hong Kong applies 41 international labour conventions of the International Labour Organisation (ILO). These conventions set standards that have a significant influence on the formulation of Hong Kong's labour laws.

Hong Kong continued to participate keenly in ILO activities during the year, keeping itself abreast of international labour issues. In June, a team of HKSAR government, employer and employee representatives attended the 100th Session of the International Labour Conference as part of the China delegation.

In December, a tripartite team attended the 15th Asia and the Pacific Regional Meeting of the ILO under the name 'Hong Kong, China'.

Labour Advisory Board

The Labour Advisory Board is a high-level and representative tripartite consultative body. It advises the Commissioner for Labour on labour matters and ILO conventions and recommendations. The board comprises 12 members, six representing employers and six representing employees. The Commissioner for Labour is the ex officio chairman.

The board has five standing committees to deal with employees' compensation, employment services, occupational safety and health, labour relations and implementation of international labour standards respectively. There is, in addition, a working group under the board to deal with applications for labour importation under the Supplementary Labour Scheme.

Employment Services

The Labour Department provides a wide range of free employment and recruitment services to job seekers and employers through a network of 11 job centres, a one-stop employment and training centre, called 'Employment in One-stop', two recruitment centres for the catering and retail industries, a Telephone Employment Service Centre, a Central Recruitment Unit and a Job Vacancy Processing Centre. Round-the-clock employment services are provided through the Interactive Employment Services website (www.jobs.gov.hk), which recorded over 0.35 billion page views in 2011, or an average page view of 0.97 million per day.

The department also organises large-scale and district-based job fairs to help job seekers find jobs, and employers to recruit workers. For major closure or

retrenchment cases, the department sets up a telephone hotline and special counters at job centres to provide priority job referral services to the retrenched workers.

In 2011, a total of 106 160 job seekers registered with the Labour Department. The department also recorded 900 564 private sector vacancies during the year, an all-time high figure and an increase of 19.7 per cent when compared with 2010. A job placement figure of 177 047 was achieved in 2011, or 18.3 per cent higher than in 2010.

Employment Programme for the Middle-aged

Under the programme, employers who engage eligible middle-aged people and provide them with on-the-job training are given a training allowance of \$2,000 per month per trainee for three to a maximum of six months by the Government. In 2011, a total of 2 834 middle-aged job seekers were employed under the programme.

Work Trial Scheme

In 2011, a total of 439 job seekers with exceptional difficulties in finding jobs took part in a 'Work Trial Scheme' run by the Labour Department. On completion of the one-month trial, each participant receives \$6,000 from the Labour Department, of which \$500 is from the organisation for which he or she worked.

Pilot Employment Navigator Programme

In 2011, 4 079 job seekers joined the Pilot Employment Navigator Programme, which was launched in December 2010 to motivate and assist unemployed job seekers to secure and remain in employment. Participants who secure employment that meets the requirements of the programme after receiving the employment consultation services provided by the department are given a cash incentive amounting to \$5,000 if they stay in the job for at least three months.

Employment in One-stop

In December 2011, a pioneer one-stop employment and training centre called 'Employment in One-stop' was set up in Tin Shui Wai to provide employment and training to needy job seekers, including unemployed able-bodied recipients of Comprehensive Social Security Assistance, a scheme to help people who cannot help themselves financially.

The centre provides new and enhanced services and facilities, such as case management and employment support services, that are currently not available at other Labour Department job centres.

Transport Support Scheme

A transport support scheme provides time-limited transport subsidy (\$600 a month, up to 12 months) to needy job seekers and low income employees living in the four designated remote districts of Tuen Mun, Yuen Long, North and Islands to encourage them to work or seek jobs.

This scheme was replaced by a 'Work Incentive Transport Subsidy Scheme' in October 2011.

Since its introduction in June 2007 and up to December 2011, the scheme received 45 339 applications for which about \$340 million was earmarked for successful applicants and some \$225 million was paid out.

Work Incentive Transport Subsidy Scheme

A territory-wide 'Work Incentive Transport Subsidy Scheme' started receiving applications since October 2011 to help employed members of low-income households reduce their cost of travelling to and from work and promote sustained employment.

These workers are given between \$300 and \$600 a month and payment can be dated back to April 2011.

A total of 10 437 workers received the subsidy at year's end.

Helping People With Disabilities Find Jobs

The Labour Department's Selective Placement Division helps people with disabilities to integrate into the community through open employment. It provides free employment counselling and placement services to people with hearing or visual impairment, physical handicap, chronic illness, intellectual disability, ex-mental illness, specific learning difficulties and attention deficit/hyperactivity disorder, etc. The division launched employment programmes and promotional events in 2011 to help these people secure jobs. It registered 2 672 job seekers with disabilities and secured 2 403 job placements during the year.

The Labour Department continues to run a 'Work Orientation and Placement Scheme' to improve the employment opportunities of people with disabilities by giving them on-the-job training and support. Employers participating in the scheme receive a financial incentive amounting to not more than \$4,000 per month from the Labour Department for a maximum period of six months. In 2011, a total of 479 job placements were achieved under the scheme.

Preparing People for Work

Youth Pre-employment Training Programme and Youth Work Experience and Training Scheme (YPTP&YWETS)

The YPTP&YWETS provides a full range of pre-employment and on-the-job training lasting between six and 12 months for young school leavers aged between 15 and 24 with educational attainment at sub-degree level or below. Over the years, the YPTP&YWETS had become a highly effective arrangement for Government departments, employers and non-governmental organisations to work together to help young people enhance their employability, improve their job search skills and secure employment.

Over 12 000 young school leavers applied to join the programme in 2010-11.

Youth Employment Support

The Labour Department operates two youth employment resource centres called 'Youth Employment Start' to offer one-stop advisory and support services to young

people aged between 15 and 29 to improve their chances of employment, and to help them secure sustainable employment or self-employment.

In 2011, the two centres provided services to 74 136 young people.

Employees Retraining Board

The Employees Retraining Board (ERB) is a statutory body set up under the Employees Retraining Ordinance. Its members include employer and employee representatives, people in the vocational training, retraining and manpower planning fields, as well as government officials. It is a co-ordinating, quality assuring and funding body which works with appointed training bodies to provide training and related services.

Following its repositioning, the ERB now provides, under its 'Manpower Development Scheme', market-driven training and employment support services through its network of about 130 appointed training bodies, operating some 415 training centres across Hong Kong. People aged 15 or above with education attainment at sub-degree level or below may enrol in its full-time placement-tied skills training and part-time skills upgrading or generic skills training courses. At the end of December 2011, there were about 850 courses covering 28 industries.

The ERB runs a Youth Training Programme to help non-engaged youths aged between 15 and 20 to regain an interest in learning and to better plan and develop their careers. The ERB also provides training and employment support to other groups which include new arrivals, ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, people recovered from work injury and occupational diseases, as well as rehabilitated ex-offenders.

In addition to providing placement support service to the graduates of its fulltime courses, the ERB administers a 'Smart Living Scheme' under which ERB graduates are referred to people needing their services which include domestic help, post-natal care, infant and child care, elderly care, escort for outpatients, care for discharged and hospital patients, as well as healthcare massage.

The ERB also attaches great importance to providing workers with training in generic skills, such as workplace language, business numeracy, IT applications, personal attributes and job search skills, to improve their chances of employment.

The ERB operates three service centres: in Kowloon East, Kowloon West and Tin Shui Wai to provide people in those districts with training and employment support.

The ERB ensures its training courses meet the standards set by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications for recognition under the Qualifications Framework.

The Government stopped providing recurrent subvention to the ERB in 2008. Since then, its main income has come from the 'Employees Retraining Levy', collected from employers of imported workers including foreign domestic helpers. The levy goes to the Employees Retraining Fund (ERF), which is administered by the

ERB. During the five-year suspension of the levy on August 1, 2008, the ERB has relied mainly on the remaining funds in the ERF to support its operations.

Skills Upgrading Scheme

A \$400 million Skills Upgrading Scheme (SUS) was launched in 2001 to provide training for in-service workers to help them adapt to changing economic needs. The SUS had since its establishment provided over 260 000 training places for workers from 26 industries. In anticipation of the SUS running out of funds, the ERB launched a 'Skills Upgrading Scheme Plus' (SUS Plus) in July 2009 to take over SUS courses in phases. The migration of SUS courses to the SUS Plus was completed in April 2011.

The SUS Plus provides part-time skills training courses to help in-service employees upgrade their specific trade skills, or to acquire new job skills in other industries if they wish to change jobs. In 2011, the ERB offered about 560 courses covering 28 industries under the SUS Plus.

Continuing Education Fund

The Government's 'Continuing Education Fund (CEF)', set up in 2002 to subsidise continuing studies for adults, approved about 38 000 applications for opening CEF accounts in 2011.

On completion of the courses under CEF, eligible applicants receive a reimbursement equal to 80 per cent of the fees they paid, which must not exceed \$10,000 per person.

Labour Relations

In 2011, the Labour Department's Labour Relations Division handled 86 trade disputes and 18 086 employment claims which, together, was 11 per cent lower than in 2010. Among the cases which conciliation services were rendered by the department, a total of 71.7 per cent were settled. There were two work stoppages during the year, resulting in a loss of 590 working days, or an average loss of 0.19 working day per 1 000 salaried employees and wage earners, one of the lowest in the world.

The Labour Department organises a wide range of activities such as talks, seminars, roving exhibitions, and produces free publications to enhance public understanding of the Employment Ordinance. Information is also disseminated through the department's website and the media.

The department promotes tripartite dialogue and co-operation at the industry level by setting up committees for nine industries, including catering, construction, theatre, logistics, property management, printing, hotel and tourism, cement and concrete, and retail industries. Each committee, comprising employers, employees and labour officials, provides an effective forum for discussion on issues concerning their respective industries.

At the enterprise level, the department established 18 human resources managers' clubs where experience-sharing sessions and briefings are held for

members to promote good labour management practices and effective employer-employee communication.

The department holds talks, exhibitions and issues promotional materials to encourage more employers to adopt family-friendly employment practices to help employees better balance their work and family responsibilities.

Trade Unions

The Registry of Trade Unions administers the Trade Unions Ordinance and promotes good and responsible trade union management. Once registered, a trade union becomes a body corporate and enjoys immunity from certain civil suits.

In 2011, 15 new unions were registered, bringing the number of registered trade unions to 836, comprising 788 employee unions, 18 employers' associations and 30 mixed organisations of employees and employers. There are also eight registered trade union federations, including one which registered in 2011. Declared membership of employee unions over the past five years has remained at around 710 000. The trade union participation rate was around 22 per cent over the same period.

About half of the employee unions are affiliated to four major labour organisations registered under the Societies Ordinance. The four major labour organisations are the Hong Kong Federation of Trade Unions (183 unions), the Hong Kong and Kowloon Trades Union Council (32 unions), the Federation of Hong Kong and Kowloon Labour Unions (72 unions), and the Hong Kong Confederation of Trade Unions (80 unions).

Minor Employment Claims Adjudication Board

The Minor Employment Claims Adjudication Board determines claims arising from disputes of statutory or contractual rights of employment. The board hears and adjudicates employment claims that involve not more than 10 claimants in each case and for sums not exceeding \$8,000 per claimant. During the year, the board dealt with 1 845 claims and approved awards amounting to \$4.02 million.

Labour Tribunal

The Labour Tribunal is part of the Judiciary. It provides a quick, inexpensive and informal method of adjudicating disputes between employees and employers, that are not within the exclusive jurisdiction of the Minor Employment Claims Adjudication Board.

In 2011, some 4 190 cases were filed with the tribunal, of which 4 097 were initiated by employees and 93 by employers. Of these, 87.9 per cent were referred to the tribunal by the Labour Department's Labour Relations Division after unsuccessful conciliation attempts. During the year, the tribunal dealt with 4 002 cases and granted awards totalling more than \$195 million, or 676 cases and \$24 million less than in 2010.

Employees' Rights and Benefits

The Employment Ordinance provides for various employment-related benefits and entitlements to employees. Over and above the statutory requirements, employers and employees are free to negotiate the terms and conditions of employment.

Labour Conditions

In general, children under 15 are prohibited by law to take up employment. However, under strict rules, children aged between 13 and 14 may work in non-industrial establishments, while young people in the 15-17 age group may work in industrial establishments, subject to regulations governing their working hours.

Labour inspectors conduct workplace inspections to ensure employers' compliance with laws safeguarding the rights and benefits of workers, and that employers possess employees' compensation insurance. Labour inspectors also check employees' proof of identity and work with the Police and the Immigration Department to combat illegal employment. During the year, 193 operations were carried out jointly by the three departments.

Enforcement Against Wage Offences

The Labour Department takes strong enforcement action against employers who fail to pay wages due to their employees. It also takes steps to prevent wage defaults. The department secured convictions for 876 summonses relating to wage offences during the year. Two company management staff and two employers were jailed or given suspended sentences, and one company management staff and two employers were ordered to perform community service as a result of wage defaults.

In addition, employers who wilfully and without reasonable excuse, fail to pay their employees the wages, or some other entitlements, awarded by the Labour Tribunal or Minor Employment Claims Adjudication Board are liable to criminal prosecution under the Employment Ordinance.

In 2011, the department secured convictions for 35 summonses relating to default of awards made by the Labour Tribunal or Minor Employment Claims Adjudication Board.

Protection of Wages on Insolvency Fund

The Protection of Wages on Insolvency Fund provides ex gratia payment to employees who are owed wages and other termination benefits by insolvent employers. Its funds come mainly from an annual levy of \$450 imposed on business registration certificates. The fund covers arrears of wages not exceeding \$36,000 accrued during a period of four months preceding the applicant's last day of service; wages in lieu of notice of termination of employment of up to \$22,500 or one month's wages, whichever is less; and severance payment of up to \$50,000 plus 50 per cent of any entitlement in excess of \$50,000. The maximum amount of ex gratia payment per eligible worker is \$278,500.

In 2011, the fund received 3 729 applications for ex gratia payment. During the year, the fund paid out \$74.4 million to 3 886 applicants, and recorded a surplus of \$477 million.

Employees' Compensation

Hong Kong's employees' compensation practice follows the 'no-fault' principle whereby compensation is payable regardless of whether the injury, occupational disease or death is the employee's fault. The Employees' Compensation Ordinance covers injuries or death caused by accidents arising from, and in the course of, employment or by specified occupational diseases. An employer must be in possession of a valid insurance policy to cover his liabilities both under the ordinance and the common law.

The Labour Department assists injured employees and the families of deceased employees to obtain compensation from their employers under the Employees' Compensation Ordinance. It also administers a scheme that provides interest-free loans to workers injured in job-related accidents.

During the year, the Labour Department delivered talks, distributed leaflets, published articles in newspapers, and made announcements on TV, radio and public transport to help employers and employees better understand their rights and obligations prescribed in the ordinance.

An 'Employees Compensation Assistance Scheme' helps injured employees, or family members of deceased employees to obtain compensation from defaulting employers. The scheme is financed by a levy imposed on all employees' compensation insurance policies taken out by employers.

Pneumoconiosis and/or mesothelioma sufferers are eligible for compensation under the Pneumoconiosis and Mesothelioma (Compensation) Ordinance administered by the Pneumoconiosis Compensation Fund Board. Those diagnosed to have contracted pneumoconiosis before the ordinance went into effect in 1981 may apply for ex gratia benefits from the Government under the Pneumoconiosis Ex Gratia Scheme.

At year's end, 1 869 pneumoconiosis and/or mesothelioma sufferers were receiving payments under either the ordinance or the ex gratia scheme. Family members of 123 pneumoconiosis and/or mesothelioma sufferers who died from the diseases were also granted compensation during the year.

The 'Occupational Deafness Compensation Board' administers the Occupational Deafness Compensation Scheme which provides for the compensation of persons employed in specified noisy occupations who suffer hearing loss as a result of prolonged exposure to excessive noise at work, and the reimbursement of monies spent on hearing assistive devices. In 2011, the board approved 322 compensation applications and paid out \$25.29 million in compensation. It also approved 620 applications for hearing assistance devices, costing \$2.29 million. The board also runs rehabilitation programmes for people with impaired hearing caused by their jobs. In 2011, the board provided 517 such programmes.

Retirement Protection

All employees, except those who are not required to join any local retirement scheme under the law, are provided with some form of retirement protection under the Mandatory Provident Fund Schemes Ordinance or other retirement schemes, such as those regulated under the Occupational Retirement Schemes Ordinance and other statutory pension plans.

Statutory Minimum Wage

The Minimum Wage Ordinance came into force on Labour Day (May 1, 2011) prescribing a minimum rate of \$28 per hour. During the year, the Labour Department carried out territory-wide publicity campaigns to help employers and employees better understand their obligations and entitlements under the ordinance, and labour inspectors visited business establishments throughout Hong Kong to make sure employers were abiding by the law.

The first two-year term of the Minimum Wage Commission started on March 1, 2011. The commission is an independent statutory body established under the Minimum Wage Ordinance. Its main function is to make recommendation to the Chief Executive in Council about the statutory minimum wage rate. In doing so, the commission is required to strike a balance between forestalling excessively low wages and minimising the loss of low-paid jobs while sustaining Hong Kong's economic growth and competitiveness. The commission comprises a chairperson and not more than 12 members from the labour sector, business community, academia and the Government.

Employment Agencies

The Employment Agencies Administration Office enforces Part XII of the Employment Ordinance and the Employment Agency Regulations which empower it to issue licences to employment agencies, monitor, investigate complaints, and make prosecution. The office issued 2 334 employment agency licences and revoked three during the year.

Policy Study on Standard Working Hours

The Labour Department is carrying out the study on standard working hours, requested by the Chief Executive in his 2010-11 Policy Address. The study, expected to be completed by mid-2012, will lay a good foundation for public discussion.

Imported Workers

Employment of Professionals

Non-local talented people and professionals who possess special skills, knowledge or experience of value to Hong Kong may apply to take up employment in Hong Kong if they have secured a job that cannot be filled readily by local workers and receive a remuneration package broadly commensurate with those in the market. Business people and entrepreneurs who can make substantial contribution to the economy are also welcome to bring capital and expertise to

Hong Kong. In 2011, 38 645 talented people and professionals from more than 100 countries or territories were admitted for employment.

Employment of Non-local Students

Since May 19, 2008, non-local fresh graduates of full-time locally-accredited degree or higher level studies may apply to stay for one year in Hong Kong to take up employment. Those who have previously obtained a degree or higher qualification in a full-time and locally-accredited programme in Hong Kong may also apply to return to Hong Kong for employment if the job they have secured is at a level normally taken up by degree-holders and paid at market rates.

Supplementary Labour Scheme

Under the Supplementary Labour Scheme, employers may apply to import workers to fill vacancies at the technician level or below. The Government's policy on labour importation is based on two cardinal principles:

- local workers must be given priority in filling job vacancies available in the market; and
- employers who are genuinely unable to recruit local workers to fill their vacancies should be allowed to import workers.

All applications made under the scheme are considered on a case-by-case basis. To ensure priority of employment for local workers, employers have to undertake a four-week open recruitment exercise for each application before their applications are submitted to the Labour Advisory Board for consideration and to the Government for a decision.

The requirements of open recruitment are: advertising in newspapers, job-matching by the Labour Department, and organising retraining courses for local workers with the assistance of the Employees Retraining Board, if appropriate.

At the end of 2011, there were 2 003 imported workers working in Hong Kong under the scheme.

Foreign Domestic Helpers

Foreign domestic helpers may be admitted if, subject to immigration control, they have relevant working experience; and if their employers are Hong Kong residents who will offer terms of employment as stipulated in the standard employment contract prescribed by the Government.

The terms of employment include free and suitable accommodation, free food or food allowance in lieu, wages not lower than the minimum allowable wage set by the Government, free passage from and to the helper's place of origin and free medical treatment. Employers must also meet required levels of income or assets.

The demand for foreign domestic helpers has increased steadily over the past three decades. At the end of 2011, there were 299 961 foreign domestic helpers in Hong Kong, or 5 per cent up on 2010. About half of them are from Indonesia and the rest are mostly from the Philippines.

Occupational Safety and Health

The Labour Department continues to improve safety and health standards in the workplace through a three-pronged strategy of legislation and enforcement, publicity and promotion, as well as education and training.

Safety and health at work in Hong Kong has improved significantly in the past decade as a result of the concerted effort of all parties concerned, including employers, employees, contractors, safety practitioners and the Government.

In 2011, the number of occupational injuries was 40 578, a drop of 13.7 per cent from the 47 023 cases a decade ago. Over the same period, the number of industrial accidents fell from 22 453 to 13 658, a decrease of 39.2 per cent. In 2011, a total of 353 cases of occupational diseases were confirmed, representing a cumulative fall of 3 per cent from the 364 cases over the same period.

Enforcement

The Labour Department inspects workplaces regularly to ensure compliance with occupational safety and health laws, particularly in the places of high-risk industries and organisations with poor safety records. The department also conducts special enforcement campaigns targeting accident-prone industries such as those involved in repair, maintenance, alteration and addition (RMAA) works, new construction works, catering, cargo and container handling, and others. The department stepped up enforcement measures during the summer to ensure that workers at construction sites and other outdoor workplaces are protected from heat strokes.

During the year, the department served 1 356 Improvement Notices on companies and organisations, ordering them to improve safety conditions at their workplaces promptly, and 351 Suspension Notices on those where work activities or the use of plant or substances posed imminent risks of death or serious bodily injury to employees. A total of 1 746 cases were heard in the courts which handed down fines totalling \$12 million. The defendants in 85 per cent of the cases were convicted.

Promotion and Education

The department, in collaboration with the Occupational Safety and Health Council (OSHC), continued carrying out a large-scale two-year publicity programme launched in 2010, to enhance safety awareness among contractors and workers engaged in RMAA works. The department also continued to promote the Occupational Safety Charter and Workplace Hygiene Charter which urges employers and employees to maintain a safe and healthy environment at their workplaces. It also organised safety award schemes for the construction and catering industries.

The Labour Department conducts courses and talks to help workers better understand the occupational safety and health laws. During the year, over 820 courses and talks were held for some 14 500 employees. The department also held over 1 200 health talks which were attended by some 39 000 people. In particular, the department collaborated with OSHC, employers' associations and trade unions

of the retail and catering industries as well as relevant professional bodies to promote preventive measures for work-related leg disorders.

The department also collaborated with the OSHC, the Construction Industry Council, and relevant employers' associations and workers' unions to step up publicity on heat stroke prevention through promotional visits to construction workers, professional drivers and other outdoor high-risk workplaces, promotion of methods for risk assessment of heat stroke and effective measures for preventing heat stroke.

Occupational Health Clinics

The Labour Department provides occupational health services to workers at its occupational health clinics in Kwun Tong and Fanling. Together they held some 13 200 clinical consultations with workers during the year.

Occupational Safety and Health Council

The Occupational Safety and Health Council is charged with promoting a culture of occupational safety and health in Hong Kong. It provides training, consultancy, research and information services to achieve this goal.

During the year, 1 749 courses on occupational safety and health were held, attended by 41 917 trainees. Opened in August, the Occupational Safety and Health Academy aims at building a solid foundation for promoting a safety culture. It is equipped with facilities including interactive classrooms, different types of training sites and simulated environments for work and training exercises.

Large-scale infrastructure projects pose challenges to efforts in maintaining workers' safety and health. The council has strengthened its safety promotional and educational initiatives targeting these projects. As a result of an increasing number of accidents occurring at RMAA works sites, the council launched a series of campaigns to enhance safety awareness among workers, contractors and estate owners. The council also joined forces with the Housing Authority to manage two schemes called 'Independent Safety Audit Scheme for Maintenance and Improvement Works Contracts' and 'Surprise Safety Inspection Programme' to enhance contractors' safety performance.

The council has been providing small and medium enterprises (SMEs) with financial support and technical advice for procurement of safety equipment through a number of SME sponsorship schemes. During the year, the council worked with the Social Welfare Department to launch a scheme to prevent accidents occurring in the handling of electric hoists for patients in residential care homes.

The council staged an occupational health day and presented awards annually to encourage industries to pay greater attention to occupational health. A new category on work-stress management was added to the year's awards.

Internet and multi-media tools were used more extensively. New educational materials on safety were developed for secondary school teachers. The council's bi-monthly magazine *Green Cross* is available in electronic version for free.

A 'Safe Community' programme advocated by the World Health Organisation is being carried out in 10 districts across Hong Kong to improve safety and health standards continuously and systematically.

Websites

Labour and Welfare Bureau: www.lwb.gov.hk

Education Bureau: www.edb.gov.hk

Security Bureau: www.sb.gov.hk

Labour Department: www.labour.gov.hk

Occupational Safety and Health Council: www.oshc.org.hk

Immigration Department: www.immd.gov.hk

Employees Retraining Board: www.erb.org