



Persatuan Pengguna Pulau Pinang Consumers Association of Penang

檳城消費人協會 பிளாங்கு பயனீட்டாளர் சங்கம்

10 Jalan Masjid Negeri, 11600 Pulau Pinang, Malaysia
Tel: 604-8299511 Fax: 604-8298109
email: consumerofpenang@gmail.com

Websites:
www.consumer.org.my

Press Statement

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WORKSITE ACCIDENTS ARE AN INDICTMENT OF DOSH'S INEFFECTIVENESS

The Human Resource Ministry disclosed in June 2015 that 92.5% of construction sites do not comply with specifications set by the Department of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH). This is a serious indictment of the DOSH's Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) in carrying out its duties to prevent such non-compliance with the laws.

The statistics illustrate the ineffectiveness of DOSH in sending the message across to construction companies that laws have to be complied with at all times. The figures make a mockery of notices at worksites proclaiming "SAFETY FIRST". Putting up these notices does not absolve the industries from liability for injuries and death. Neither do these notices absolve DOSH from ensuring that all safety precautions have been adhered to.

According to DOSH, it only inspects worksites of projects costing less than RM20 million. As for bigger projects, matters are left in the hands of the companies under the concept of "self regulation" because they can afford to engage consultants.

In two major cases in Penang, the scaffolding collapse at the 2nd Penang Bridge and the fin wall collapse at the 21-storey UMNO building, the Commission of Inquiry set up by the Penang state government found that there was incompetency and negligence. The Commission recommended that action be taken against the consultants responsible for the inappropriate design / plan and the "severely faulty or defective construction" of the scaffold at piers 6 and 7 of Ramp 2 of the 2nd bridge.

This should be a lesson to DOSH that consultants in construction companies also need to be audited to keep them on their toes at all times.

DOSH gives two famous excuses for the continuing spate of worksite accidents, firstly its officers cannot be at all the worksites at all times and secondly the attitude of workers who refuse to use safety gear like harnesses when working in precarious locations or wearing proper masks in areas where work operations release harmful gases.

The existence of DOSH should be reason enough for construction companies to follow the law without the need for DOSH officers to be at all the worksites all the time. This speaks volumes about DOSH's SOP in carrying out its duties. It has failed to earn the respect of the industries.

DOSH's claim that it practices high professionalism in carrying out its duties is not confirmed by the statistics. This claim contradicts its own excuse that its officers cannot be at all the construction sites at all times.

So what is needed are not more laws but a total overhaul of DOSH's SOP. Since the enforcement of the Occupational Safety and Health Act 1994 over 25 years ago, DOSH has not been able to discipline the employers of people working at jobs that pose daily risks to their safety and health.

Only with strict enforcement of the law on an on-going basis will the people take DOSH seriously. Otherwise it will just be a mockery of the law. CAP, therefore, calls on the Ministry of Human Resources to conduct an audit on the Standard Operating Procedures (SOP) of DOSH to understand the ineffectiveness of its work over the past 25 years to create safety conscious and safety-law abiding work environments.

S. M. Mohamed Idris
President
Consumers Association of Penang