



Newsletter – March 2022

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Accidents at Workplaces

SEE

According to the Ministry of Manpower (MOM), a work-related accident is any unintended event that occurs in the course of work (excluding domestic work) that leads to an injury or condition. Industrial accidents occurring in the course of work are included in this definition. MOM also includes occupational diseases within this definition.

There are many reasons why industrial accidents happen. Some of these reasons are due to the nature of the job, such as the construction industry (the inherent risks involved). Some are due to fire hazards such as the chemicals industry while others are due to negligence or unsafe acts. Many of the accidents could be purely accidents in nature without the fault of the employer such as slipping and falling onto the floor. Sometimes the workers are overworked without proper rest and breaks and these lapses have given rise to serious accidents.

To protect the safety, health and welfare of persons at work in workplaces in Singapore, Singapore Parliament has enacted the “Workplace Safety and Health Act”. There is no doubt that an employee has the right to a safe working environment and protection for his health while he is at work. Cases in court have emphasized the fact that industrial accidents can happen anywhere and include even accidents happening outside the workplace, office or factory, when, for example, the worker has to travel on the roads or highways for the purposes of his work. Thus, for example, road accidents can also be accidents in the course of employment and are included in the category of industrial accidents. According to the authors of the book “Employment Law in Singapore” [Edited by Benjamin Yim (2016)], “the Workplace Safety and Health Act seeks primarily to protect workers in Singapore from safety and health hazards which they encounter in the course of their work. It is the culmination of a series of similar legislation in the past which tended to focus more on the safety and health of workers in factories specifically”.

The other legislation in Singapore, the “Employment Act”, clearly lays down the working hours, rest hours and off days that a worker is entitled to and these measures

are strictly enforced here. It is obvious that once a worker is over worked, accidents can easily happen. Therefore, rest hours, breaks and off days are essential for workers.

In Singapore, there were 11,350 workplace injuries in 2020 (in 2019 this figure was 13,779). Apart from workplace injuries, there were also Dangerous Occurrences and Occupational Diseases. A considerable number of man-days were also lost in when such incidents occur. (Source: WORKPLACE SAFETY AND HEALTH REPORT 2020, MINISTRY OF MANPOWER). [(According to MOM, a “Dangerous Occurrence refers to incident where no person is injured, but which had the potential to cause serious injury and death”.)]

There are laws under which you can claim medical leave, wages for medical leave and compensation for non-fatal injuries. These laws also provide appropriate compensation for fatal injuries. An employer can also be charged in court for unsafe working environments or unsafe acts. In certain cases, where applicable, the employer can be sued in a civil action for negligence that resulted in physical damage, economic loss, injuries or fatalities.

Workers must also take care of their health by going for regular medical checkups, and see a doctor if they are not well. This is also now crucial during this Covid-19 pandemic. Employers must service the machinery and equipment at the workplaces regularly to ensure that they are safe to use. The presence of a Work Safety Officer is vital in a workplace and he/she must do his/her work diligently.

In the present Covid-19 pandemic, it is obvious that all employers and employees have to take all the extra safety management measures to ensure that there are no of Covid-19 cases at their workplaces.

The Straits Times dated 20 February 2022 (ST) stated that “From April 2022, employers that hire migrant workers who live in dormitories or work in the construction, marine shipyard and process sectors must buy primary care plans [PCPs] to cover their workers’ healthcare costs.” ST also stated that “ The PCPs complement the legal responsibility of employers to buy and maintain medical insurance coverage of at least S\$15,000 a year for each work permit holder they employ, covering inpatient care and day surgery.

Let us pray for all workers that they will not meet any accident in the course of their work.

-Gabriel Sebastian

Personal Reflection

1. How do we feel when a worker is injured or dies in an accident?
2. Have we, on our part, made our workplace safe, or are we contributing to the risk of accidents happening at our workplace?

JUDGE

3. What do the gospels, the Catholic Social Teachings and the encyclicals say about the health and safety of workers? Are these references helpful?
4. What does our Lord Jesus say on this topic? Is it a part of the command to “Love Thy Neighbour”.

ACT

5. How can we do our part to provide a safe environment for our workplace?
 - a. As an individual; and
 - b. As a Movement.
6. During this pandemic, what are the extra precautions we can take to prevent a rise in the Covid-19 cases?