

KUALA LUMPUR-- Construction sites can be categorised as danger zones, not only to workers but also members of the public, be them passers-by or residents staying in the vicinity. Construction workers at these sites are exposed to potential hazards like height, weight, electricity, motors, sharp moving objects, lifts, chemicals, dust, noise, confined spaces and many more. In most cases, construction sites are accessible to non-workers or unsuspecting members of the public.

Nowadays, roadwork construction are located close to moving traffic, while shopping complexes or other public buildings cannot afford to lower down their shutters to the public, hence posing possible dangers when parts of the building undergo renovations.

**According to the president of the Malaysian Association of Standards Users (Standards Users), Datuk N. Marimuthu, the Department of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH), Construction Industry Development Board (CIDB), developers and other relevant parties play crucial roles to minimise accidents at construction sites.**

"The target should be zero fatality at construction sites and also in any workplace," he told Bernama when commenting on a news report of a fatal accident when a youth died after he plunged into a nine-metre-wide gap while trying to enter an area that was undergoing renovation work, located on the floor at a prominent shopping complex here recently.

### **SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS**

The likelihood of injuries to the public is influenced by factors like the proximity of the construction work to public areas.

These sites maybe located near residences, shopping centres as well as schools and playgrounds. The number and nature of hazards at the sites, together with the duration of construction work should also be considered, besides putting up the perimeter fencing or other safety features, which can be deterrents.

"So far and as practicable as possible, at the end of each day's work, the sites are to be made safe, in event of unauthorised access by the public," said Marimuthu.

He cited some preventive measures that include fencing of pits, open excavations and similar structures, covering of holes, warning signs, locking of access gates (fenced up sites) and presence of security guards if necessary.

"Other engineering or procedural approach which is infallible at preventing intrusion at work sites can also be considered," he said.

### **SAFETY STANDARDS**

Elaborating further on safety standards for the public during construction work, Marimuthu said these should also include preventing falling objects from endangering the public.

"Use barricades or safety nets, guard the public from cranes, motor vehicles or barges and other machinery and equipment. Alert the public of high decibel noise, construction equipment, ensuring that walkways near construction sites are both accessible and safe.

"Store hazardous materials and substances, assess structures properly before drilling or digging trenches place and have an emergency backup action plan at construction sites," he said.

### **EXPECTATIONS OF STANDARDS USERS**

According to Marimuthu, Standard Users aspire to see industries, be it construction or manufacturing and others, to self regulate.

As for now, he said the growing concern is over the large number of foreign workers employed by the construction industry, where their injuries are not taken into consideration in statistical records provided by DOSH.

Such distortion, he said does not represent an accurate picture of the level of safety in the construction industry.

"We have become increasingly dependent on these foreign workers and exclusion of their data may give us a false impression that everything is just fine and no actions need to be taken with any sense of urgency," argued Marimuthu.

Standards users, he said, seek from DOSH, the CIDB and the Ministry of Human Resource and Ministry of Works under which they operate respectively, to exercise to the fullest, the power of enforcement provided for them under the Laws and Regulations related to construction sites and occupational safety and health.

He is also asking the relevant authorities to develop and implement mandatory standards to audit and evaluate safety performance at construction sites and implicate developers and building owners, when unsafe practices caused injuries and fatality to workers as well as the public.

"Stop protecting only the developers and building owners. The laws should seek to punish the owners and developers instead of looking for a scapegoat. Putting the onus on developers and owners will ensure past incidents (like the one causing the death of Dr Liew Boon Horng in early 2006 at Plaza Damas and two workers at Pavilion Kuala Lumpur in 2007) do not recur," said Marimuthu.

### **BUILDING PROGRAMMES**

Marimuthu thinks that the CIDB, which is already carrying, in varying capacity, building

## **Bernama : Growing Concern Over Safety Standards At Construction Sites**

Written by Administrator

Monday, 14 September 2009 15:21 -

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programmes for both developers and workers; must include the awareness and appreciation of public safety into those programmes.

He explained that the public has the right to expect safety at construction sites especially if they are present during the operations, for example in shopping complexes and around shop lots.

CIDB and DOSH, he said should work with organisations -- normally non-governmental -- which have good outreach to the public.

"Together they can promote the importance of identifying safety issues and problems and complying with safety standards (among the public), not only for construction sites but also for other types of workplaces such as hospitals and petrol stations," he said.

-- BERNAMA

**31 March 2008**