

INTERACTIVE: How much are you at risk from accidents at work?

PETALING JAYA: While 2020 was the safest year for workplaces due to sector-wide shutdown from the Covid-19 pandemic, you're still at the highest risk for workplace accidents if you're a man aged 20 between 24 and you work at a factory in Selangor.

The year 2020 also gives rise to another new category of occupational safety.

Accidents while working from home or WFH.

According to data from the Statistics Department, for the year 2020, the number of occupational accidents was 32,674 cases, down 19.9% from 40,811 cases recorded in 2019.

Last year was Malaysia's safest year, with workplace accidents dropping almost 20%.

As one of the biggest sectors, manufacturing continued to record the highest number of workplace accidents.

Selangor was the state with the highest number of workplace accidents but Johor has the highest number of fatalities.

Men vastly outnumbered women in the number of accidents and fatalities. More Malaysians also died, as compared to foreign workers, in the same period.

Most of those who got into workplace accidents were those aged between 20 and 24. However, workers aged between 30 and 34 recorded the highest fatality rate at 2.37.

At the same time, the first employment injury case registered for WFH was in June 2020.

As of May 23 this year, a total of 1,504 applications were registered, out of which 1,048 were approved. A total of 129 cases were rejected while the remaining were still being processed.

Chief statistician Datuk Seri Mohd Uzir Mahidin said based on the analysis done, the government's target to reduce the occupational accident rate to 2.53 and the death rate of 4.36 by 2020 was achieved.

"Among the main factors contributing to this statistical decline are the measures of closure and restrictions imposed by the government on economic activities to curb the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic that is currently plaguing the country and the world."

The quarterly statistics showed a sharp decrease of 44.6% of total occupational accidents and 62.1% of deaths from occupational accidents recorded in the second quarter of 2020 when strict movement restrictions were enforced across the country," he said, adding that this was similarly reflected in other countries like Britain and Singapore.

The statistics, added Mohd Uzir, showed that the composition of occupational accidents was in line with the structure of Malaysia's working population according to age group.

"About 71.8% or 23,464 cases of occupational accidents involved workers under the age of 45," he said.

All sectors, added Mohd Uzir, showed reductions in total and fatality rates due to occupational accidents in 2020 but the construction sector remained the industry with the highest risk of occupational accident deaths.

About 62.8% of occupational accidents were caused by three types of accidents: fall (7,885 accidents, 88 deaths), stepping on, striking against or being struck by objects, including falling objects (7,285 accidents, 84 deaths), and other unclassified type of accidents (5,351 accidents, 21 deaths).

Occupational safety experts warn that besides increased risks associated with fire, and slip and fall, workers should also be wary of ergonomic hazards like musculoskeletal disorders and eye fatigue when working from home.

Alliance for Safe Community chairman Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye said while working from home continued to be the trend for most workers, employers should ensure that their workers' needs and support were taken care of.

Such needs, he added, covered the necessary tools and equipment to help workers deliver when working remotely while support would include making sure that workers were not being overly scrutinised as long as they delivered.

"Employers need to understand that working from home has its challenges as workers juggle between work and life amid the pandemic.

"It can lead to other issues, such as stress, other than accidents or health issues because most homes or living places are not meant to be the workplace.

"Without the proper facilities, support and awareness, problems are bound to happen," he said in an interview.

Lee warned of ergonomics hazards among those working from home, including musculoskeletal disorders, eye fatigue, increased risks associated with fire, slip and fall.

"Not all homes are conducive as a workplace unless one has the sufficient space to turn this into a study room or workstation, where one can sit down properly and work.

"Those living in a small house or renting a room will have to compromise working on the sofa or bed. With improper posture, it can lead to more health impacts and hazards," he said.

Lee also lauded the government's move to introduce a work-from-home policy soon, saying this should be expedited to safeguard workers' interest with the proper procedures laid out, including the roles of both the employees and employers.

"The ministry should establish a balanced policy by including input from both sides through engagement with employers and unions before finalising it.

"There is no point of having a policy that favours only one side. Workers need to be assured of their rights to work from home and it can be worked out harmoniously," he said.

On the data from the Occupational Safety and Health Department, Lee said although the number of workplace accidents decreased last year due to the movement control order, accidents in the manufacturing sector remained high.

"This has been the trend even before the Covid-19 pandemic," he said, adding that the manufacturing companies employed hundreds of thousands of workers, far higher than other sectors.

"It is followed by the construction industry, which involves high-risk work," he added.

When contacted, the Department of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH) director-general Zailee Dollah said the impending work-from-home policy was to "address various aspects concerning employers and employees" amid the movement restrictions.

This was following over 5,000 complaints received through the Human Resources Ministry's Working For Workers (WFW) app on various labour issues, especially on bosses not allowing employees to work from home.

The WFW app was introduced on May 3.

<https://www.thestar.com.my/news/nation/2021/09/02/interactive-how-much-are-you-at-risk-from-accidents-at-work>