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Drug-Prevention (Special Report)
PROMOTING DRUG-FREE WORKPLACES

By: Wan Nurzila Rahman

KUALA LUMPUR, Sept 14 (Bernama) -- The private sector has long been urged to promote drug-free workplaces to effectively combat dadah addiction, Malaysia's No 1 enemy at the workplace.

Companies have also been advised to launch special preventive and rehabilitation programmes for workers to deal with the scourge especially among companies whose workforce included ex-addicts.

Studies show that drug abuse in workplaces accounted for 20 to 25 per cent of accidents at worksites involving intoxicated workers injuring themselves and their colleagues and nearly 15 to 30 per cent of on-the-job fatalities linked to drugs and alcohol.

Employees with drug and alcohol dependence might claim three times as many sickness benefits and file five times as many workers' compensation claims, while absenteeism is two to three times higher for drug and alcohol users than other employees, according to the studies.

Private sector firms around the world are now taking preventive action to overcome the problem and are deriving benefits in terms of improved health, better quality, higher productivity and increased profits.

Malaysia through the National Association For the Prevention of Drug Abuse (Pemadam) has launched several programmes to help overcome the problem such as the Sinar Harapan Programme in 1994.

Under the programme, ex-addicts are given a chance to be hired by companies nationwide to work in the semi-skill production sector.

Director of Harris Advanced Technology (M) Human Resources Ahmad Fuad Mohd Amin said, "Priority is given to those about to be released from rehabilitation centres and those with the potential to be fully rehabilitated."

He said it was well accepted based on the many applications received from private sector firms when it was first launched by Pemadam.

"Harris is one of the companies which is ever willing to assist ex-addicts especially in terms of proving their ability and supporting their comeback to society," he said.

Harris Advanced Technology (M) is a full-fledged semiconductor manufacturing and testing facility and one of the largest in Malaysia.

Ahmad Fuad said urine tests and regular check-ups at the in-house clinic were compulsory for the 4,300-strong workforce of which 77 per cent were female.

"We have set up our own recreational and health programmes such as the Red Cross Society, Fire Brigade team, and sports activities, and we are planning to register our own recreational club in a Rakan Muda Programme," he said.

He said although drug addiction was quite rare among Harris' employees, the company had taken up safety measure and was working closely with Pemadam and the police department to prevent the problem from affecting them.

According to Ahmad Fuad, the company used to hire 20 former drug addicts from local rehabilitation centre with the potential to be fully rehabilitated before the programme was withdrawn by Pemadam.

"We arranged their working schedule mostly in daytime and the centre provided transport to bring them to work and back, daily" said Ahmad Fuad.

He said these workers needed a longer time to adapt with a normal life, while friends and employers should be more considerate towards them.

"I hope Pemadam will give a nod to retry the programme, but I believe they have their own reasons in not doing so."

Apart from that, Ahmad Fuad said the workers were also encouraged to participate in a broad range of activities arranged by the company such as talks and counseling sessions to help them become aware of the danger concerned and the consequences.

"We do need to sacrifice a bit of our working time for talks and other programmes, and so far we have received overwhelming response from our staff including locals and foreign workers," said Ahmad Fuad.

Ahmad Fuad also said that Harris would send their security and health committee officers to the "Third International Private Sector Conference on Drugs in the Workplace and the Community for Asia and Pacific Region" to be held in KL from Oct 3 to 6.

Malaysia was chosen by the United Nations International Drug Control Programme (UNDCP) and International Labour Organization (ILO) to host the conference. Two such conferences were held in Spain in 1993 and Brazil in 1995.

Papers on various aspects of the drug problem in community and workplaces would be presented at the conference, covering topics on Tripartite and Multilateral Collaboration to Prevent Drug Abuse, Experiences and Innovations, Joining Forces for United Action and Emerging Issues.

Among the Malaysian paper presenters will be vice-president of Genting Berhad Tun Haniff Omar, senior ISIS fellow Tan Sri Ghazalie Shafie and president of the Malaysian Trades Union Congress (MTUC) Zainal Rampak.

The foreign speakers will include Prof Dr Steve Allsop of Australia, Ric Durrant of UNDCP/ILO and Javeed Naseer of Pakistan.

Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad is expected to open the conference. Private sector firms and non-governmental organisations from around the world are expected to participate in the four-day event.

"We are trying our best to strive ahead in reviewing approaches and policies towards a drug-free environment in our company, and I hope other companies will also make an effort to come up with something useful for both the company and the nation," added Ahmad Fuad. -- BERNAMA

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