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Fong-SMIs/BM

SAFETY, HEALTH AWARENESS LACKING IN SMIs, SAYS DR FONG

BATU PAHAT, Sept 21 (Bernama) -- Negative attitude among entrepreneurs of small-and medium-scale industries (SMIs) is a major factor hampering improvements to occupational safety and health standards of workers in the sector, Human Resources Minister Datuk Dr Fong Chan Onn said today.

He said SMI entrepreneurs, operating small businesses with limited capital, often think of immediate returns for every investment.

"Since profits from money spent on safety and health at workplaces take a longer time to come by, they are not given priority," he said when opening a seminar on Occupational Safety and Health in SMIs.

The text of his speech was read out by Semerah state assemblyman Tan Teck Poh.

Dr Fong said a small workforce and mostly comprising family members made it difficult for them to comply to work procedures and safety regulations like wearing safety gears while at work.

Hiring of foreign workers was another reason for the lack of emphasis on safety requirements at workplaces, more so when the foreigners do not know their rights with regard to training and protection from dangers at work sites, he said.

Also, foreign workers might not be familiar in wearing safety equipment as required by their employers and this would certainly be a drawback in efforts to improve occupational safety and health standards in SMIs, he said.

He said many SMI entrepreneurs were still unaware of the importance of occupational safety and health not only for their workers' welfare but also for their business.

"Therefore, more publicity and dissemination of information must be carried out, besides doing research to identify low-cost solutions which are appropriate to improve occupational safety and health standards at workplace," he said.

Dr Fong said SMIs also faced financial constraints to implement occupational safety and health procedures at work sites.

Any financial incentive in the form of low-interest loans and tax exemptions might be able to help them, he said.

He said to organise the seminar free-of-charge for SMI entrepreneurs, the government through the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) paid 20 per cent of the cost, while the Small-and Medium-Scale Industries Development Corporation (SMIDEC) absorbed the rest.

Meanwhile, NIOSH Chairman Tan Sri Lee Lam Thye urged SMI entrepreneurs to use the money saved from the reduction in the corporate tax to improve occupational safety and health standards at their workplaces.

He said the savings estimated at not less than RM8,000 a year by each of the 20,000 SMIs in the country must be spent for the purpose.

"This is because 80 per cent of the industrial accidents in the country occurred in SMIs, indicating that more efforts were needed to improve the occupational safety and health standards at workplaces," he told a media conference after the opening of the one-day course for SMI entrepreneurs.

In the 2003 Budget tabled by Prime Minister Datuk Seri Dr Mahathir Mohamad at the Dewan Rakyat yesterday, the corporate tax for SMIs was cut from 28 per cent to 20 per cent.

Lee said studies carried out by NIOSH showed occupational safety and health standards among SMIs were still not satisfactory.

He said statistics from the Social Security Organisation (Socso) revealed 95,222 worksite accidents occurred in 1999.

-- BERNAMA

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