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Fong: Cancer, skin diseases in workplace on the rise

By: Deborah Loh

PUTRAJAYA: The number of work related diseases, including cancer, skin ailments and respiratory illnesses, have increased.

Human Resources Minister Datuk Seri Fong Chan Onn said this may be because there was less emphasis placed on occupational diseases as compared with workplace accidents.

“The focus in occupational safety and health is usually on preventing accidents at the workplace and less on occupational diseases,” Fong said after launching the Convention on Occupational Safety and Health here yesterday.

He said public awareness about occupational diseases was low compared with knowledge of workplace accidents.

Socso records an average of 200 occupational diseases annually. In 2005, 194 cases were reported, an increase over the 185 cases in 2004.

In the public sector, 110 civil servants reported work-related illnesses between January to June to the Department of Occupational Safety and Health (DOSH), compared with 9 cases last year.

A check at Socso’s website, www.perkeso.gov.my, showed that diseases reported in 2005 included hearing impairment caused by noise (48 cases), cancer caused by dust from wood (15), miners’ nystagmus (14) and skin diseases caused by physical, chemical or biological agents (10).

There were also 33 cases of unnamed disease caused by physical agents.

Fong said Socso had guidelines on handling occupational diseases but more awareness about prevention was needed.

Socso pays benefits for occupational diseases listed under the Employees’ Social Security Act 1969.

Employers who register their workers and contribute on their behalf to Socso cannot be used so long as the disease is covered by Socso.

For civil servants, claims related to diseases are sent to the Finance Ministry with supporting documents from DOSH which investigates their claims.

On the industrial accidents, Fong said Malaysia had reduced the number from 10 accidents per 1000 workers in 1997 to 5 per 1000 last year. “We are way behind advanced countries, which have achieved 2 or 3 accidents per 1000 workers.”



Datuk Seri Dr Fong Chan Onn putting on a dust filter during the launch of the Convention on Occupational Safety and Health in Putrajaya yesterday. Behind him is Deputy Human Resources Minister Datuk Abdul Rahman Bakar.