

Tougher MOM at work

Ministry to punish employers who put maids in way of danger

IN the last five years, 14 employers have been fined for putting their maids in the way of danger as they go about household chores.

These employers have also been banned from ever hiring maids again.

The Ministry of Manpower (MOM) disclosed this to stress that it would not hesitate to prosecute employers who fail to see to it that their maids worked safely.

MOM pointed to a work permit rule which requires employers to provide a safe work environment for their maids. Those who flout it stand to be fined up to S\$5,000 (RM12,169), or jailed six months, or be both fined and jailed.

The briefing was held in the wake of six fatal falls this year involving maids cleaning windows or hanging laundry.

Last Thursday, a 23-year-old Indonesian maid became the latest when she fell 30 storeys to her death in Telok Blangah Heights. She was believed to have been cleaning the windows in her employer's flat just minutes before.

Between 2007 and 2011, 24 maids fell to their deaths in the course of work. Another 45 fell, but survived.

MOM divisional director Aw Kum Cheong said the ministry was doing everything it could to reduce the number of such deaths, and that it was puzzled as to why these fatalities were still happening despite efforts to educate both maids and employers.



Safer way to do it: Francisco trying her hand at cleaning windows during the safety class conducted by MOM. — The Straits Times/Asia News Network

Citing employers' attitudes towards their maids' safety as a possible cause, he said: "There may be some who are simply very blasé about the whole issue."

MOM said that among the 14 employers fined over the last five years was one who expected the maid to climb out onto a ledge to clean the windows; another encouraged her to stand on a chair.

MOM is improving a compulsory half-day safety-training class for

newly arrived maids.

Employers can expect to receive a report card on how their maid fared in this class, so that weak areas – their blind spots in safety awareness – can be improved when they start work with the family that hires them.

The safety class, run since 2004, is part of a new mandatory settling-in programme for new maids.

Details of the new programme will be out mid-year.

MOM officials took reporters on a

tour of a training centre on Tuesday, where a class on how to clean windows and hang laundry safely was in progress.

Augelyn Garcia Francisco, 29, a new arrival from the Philippines, was in the class. Asked what she would do if her employer wanted her to do something in an unsafe way, she said: "I'd say sorry politely and say that I have to do it the proper way."

— The Straits Times / Asia News Network