



## Executive Director of the Occupational Safety and Health Council

### Message from **Ms Bonnie YAU**

**I**t is heartbreaking to learn of fatal industrial accidents in the construction industry in 2022. These accidents, which include the gondola accident in June and the tower crane collapse accident in September, result in tragic loss of lives. Yet, the losses are often more than that. In May of this year, an international company which was accused of poor working environment culture and improper handling of casualty accident investigations was removed from the S&P 500 ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) Index. Its stock price fell drastically by 8 per cent. Approximately one-third of the decline, according to some analysts, was due to the removal of stocks from the index. This demonstrates that investments in occupational safety and health (OSH) are essential and important for all organisations. Effective implementation of safety management system is the cornerstone of OSH promotion.

The Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) and the Occupational Safety and Health Council (OSHC) have been partners for many years. We have been providing an independent safety auditing system for the HA's new works projects since 1996, and later expanded the auditing system to maintenance and improvement works. To further strengthen safety management and focus on high-risk activities in new works projects, we launched the "Surprise Safety Inspection Programme" and arranged independent inspectors to conduct surprise safety inspections. In order to ensure that the assessment criteria keep pace with the times, the OSHC regularly updates the audit and inspection standards, and incorporates new construction methods and safety requirements, such as Modular Integrated Construction (MiC), into the assessment criteria.

In addition to continuous improvement of the safety management system, enhancement of work equipment is also an important part of improving OSH. To this end, the OSHC has improved the corresponding working tools and equipment in response to the OSH challenges faced by the industry, so as to achieve "small improvements, big help". The OSHC and the Labour Department have launched the "Enhanced light-duty working platform sponsorship scheme for SMEs 3.0". Compared with the "2.0 sponsorship scheme", the area and weight of the improved version of the step platform are reduced by about 30 per cent, and fences or guardrails, toe boards and protective nets made of fire-retardant materials are installed on the step platform; as for the improved version of the hop-up platform, each of its legs can be adjusted and equipped with diagonal braces, and hop-up platform of the same brand and model can be connected for use. In addition to facilitating the work of workers, it also further enhances work safety.



Regarding the anchorage of the I-shape metal brackets used in the truss-out scaffolding, the traditional I-shape metal brackets available on the market are generally difficult to be installed, particularly at the lowest anchorage point. The OSHC improved the design of I-shape metal brackets in order to provide the industry with safer alternatives. The new design of the I-shape metal bracket has 4 holes for anchoring bolts. Except that the topmost anchor bolt must be installed, workers can use 2 of the 3 lower holes to install anchor bolts in accordance with the site conditions. The new design of the I-shape metal bracket improves the installation flexibility, reduces the over stretching of the body of the workers during installation, and makes it easier and safer for the workers to carry out scaffolding work.

Suspended bamboo scaffolds (commonly known as truss-out bamboo scaffolds) are widely used in the repair and maintenance of external walls. The erection and dismantling of truss-out bamboo scaffolds are high-risk activities, and workers often have to lean out of the window and work on the external walls. In order to provide the industry with a safe and efficient choice when working on external walls, the OSHC conducted a research on Rapid Demountable Platforms (RDP). The RDP components are mainly made of aluminum alloy, which is hard and lightweight. The new design allows workers to erect and dismantle the platform by either remaining indoors or standing on a place with guardrails. It is not only easy to erect and dismantle the platform, but also reduces the risk of components falling from height.

Working in confined spaces poses various potential risks, such as soil collapse, accumulation of toxic gases and flammable gases. There were accidents inside manholes in the past resulting in casualties. The OSHC is very concerned about work safety in confined spaces. Jointly launched the "Confined Space Work Safety Promotional Campaign", the OSHC and the Labour Department enhanced "OSH Enhancement Scheme for SMEs for Safe Work at Confined Space", "OSH Star Enterprise- Confined Space Safety Accreditation Scheme" and strengthen safety promotion, adopt a multi-pronged approach to provide all rounded support and safety information to contractors, workers, foremen, site management personnel and owners working in confined spaces, so as to enhance the work safety level in confined spaces and prevent accidents.

Occupational health is as crucial as safety. The OSHC and the Labour Department jointly organise the "Heart Caring Campaign" to help frontline construction workers and security guards to "Early Screening", "Early Prevention" and "Early Management" of the cardiovascular and cerebrovascular related health problems and reduce the risk of associated diseases. We are very grateful to the HA for signing the "Heart Caring Charter", promoting the "Heart Caring Campaign" to site workers and security guards, participating in the health risk assessment on site and encouraging them to participate in the "Keep Fit GO! Class" to raise their health awareness.

The 23rd World Congress on Safety and Health at Work, co-organised by SafeWork NSW, the International Labour Organization and the International Social Security Association will be held in Sydney, Australia between 27th and 30th November, 2023. Representatives from different countries around the world will gather to discuss how we can collaborate to shape a safer and healthier working environment. This is a fresh opportunity to tell the world the good stories of Hong Kong by sharing our successful strategies and experiences in implementing OSH. I sincerely hope to see you in this event and exchange ideas with industry leaders and experts from all over the world.

I believe that the OSHC, together with the HA and the industry, will be able to further implement the theme of today's forum "Accident Prevention for Safeguarding Lives".

