

## **Paradigm Shift in Safety Partnership – Not only Employers and Employees but also Project Clients for Quantum Leap in Construction Safety Performance**

**Winson Yeung<sup>1</sup>, Jack Fong<sup>1</sup>, Alfred Sin<sup>1</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Occupational Safety and Health Council, Hong Kong

**Corresponding Author:** Winson Yeung; jenny@oshc.org.hk

---

### **ABSTRACT**

**Objective:** While employers and employees hold direct responsibility for workplace safety and health, active OSH involvement by clients plays pivotal role in significantly improving OSH performance. Independent audits supported by clients add further impetus. **Method:** The Housing Authority (HA), client for all public housing construction projects in Hong Kong, is one such keen client. OSHC helped HA developed and managed an independent safety audit system since 1996. HA top management directly involved in following up safety incidents (from near- miss to serious ones) with senior management of main contractors. Contractors' safety performance also affects their rating, critical for tender evaluations for future HA contracts. Such commitment, together with pay-for-safety scheme backed by OSHC's quarterly safety audits and surprise checks, helped HA achieve a markedly lower incident rate consistently, as compared with industry average. **Results:** Surprise checks on high-risk activities further improved site safety performance and enhance monitoring vigor. Such two-layered cross-checking approach proved to be highly effective. Accident rate for HA works projects during 2006 to 2015 was around one-fifth of industry average. Such safety performance further improved where accident rate of 5.2 per 1000 workers was recorded for HA works projects in 2021, as compared with 29.5 for industry. The periodic safety audits create opportunities for safety innovation at HA sites, enabling continuous improvement. **Conclusion:** Independent safety auditors, well-versed with relevant construction sites through quarterly visits, are well-placed to assess feasibility, practicability and effectiveness of any safety innovation as proposed by contractors.

**Keywords:** Construction safety, safety management, independent safety audit, pay-for-safety scheme, surprise safety inspection

---