

MOEL to undertake inspection campaign to prevent suffocation accidents in winter

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The Ministry of Employment and Labor (MOEL, Minister Kim Young-joo) has announced that it will conduct a programmed inspection campaign targeting more than 600 workplaces between November and December to prevent suffocation accidents in confined spaces during the winter months.

Before the start of the inspection, the Ministry plans to carry out intensive education and publicity activities for two weeks from November 1st to 15th to promote workplaces' voluntary accident prevention activities.

The government has decided to make such an active intervention because suffocation accidents occurring in confined spaces are usually very fatal. While 1.2 in 100 people injured in general industrial accidents die, one in two people injured in suffocation accidents lose their lives, which means that the death rate for suffocation accidents is 50 times higher than that for general industrial accidents.

Despite the fact that simple measures, such as ventilating worksites, measuring oxygen concentration and wearing protective equipment, can prevent suffocation accidents in confined spaces, similar types of suffocation accidents occur repeatedly every year.

In other words, suffocation accidents follow the same pattern: when a worker who has not taken safety measures collapses due to suffocation while working in a confined space, his/her colleague enters the space unprepared to rescue the worker and falls unconscious due to suffocation again.

In particular, at construction sites where lignite is used to cure concrete in winter, workers often die due to carbon monoxide poisoning while replacing used lignite with new one or checking worksites. So the inspection campaign will focus on construction sites.

Workplaces usually prone to suffocation accidents, such as those having manholes or chemical tanks, are also included in the list of target workplaces as frequent suffocation accidents are expected in such workplaces.

Kim Wang, the Director-General of the Industrial Accident Prevention and Compensation Bureau, said, "In summer suffocation accidents mainly happen in sewers and the like, whereas suffocation accidents caused by the use of lignite on construction sites occur repeatedly every winter."

He asked workplaces to thoroughly comply with preventive measures, saying "It is essential to take safety measures, such as ventilating the worksite sufficiently before work begins and measuring the carbon monoxide level, when using a lignite stove".