

## Big dorm operators adopt benchmarks

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SINGAPORE - A newly rolled out set of living standards has been adopted by a handful of major dormitory operators here, in a bid to improve the housing conditions of foreign workers.

The group behind the move is the Dormitory Association of Singapore, which was inaugurated yesterday.

It is also working on a scheme to accredit dormitory operators that meet those standards, and that scheme is expected to take shape within three to six months, said Mr Kelvin Teo, the association's president, who is also chief operating officer of Centurion Dormitories.

The association has eight founding members, which provide more than 100,000 bed spaces, or 70 per cent of those in purpose-built dormitories here.

There are over 150,000 foreign workers living in such dedicated housing facilities here.

The eight members yesterday signed and adopted a 53-point list of foundational standards, which cover bed arrangements, sanitary facilities and waste disposal, for instance.

The association hopes that dormitory operators will be licensed eventually, and that the accreditation scheme will be a licensing condition.

Under the Ministry of Manpower's (MOM) Employment of Foreign Manpower Regulations, employers are required to provide workers with acceptable accommodation that meets requirements such as those on fire safety, building structural standards and environmental health.

Employers can be fined up to \$10,000 or jailed for up to a year, or both, for each foreign worker housed in unacceptable conditions.

Mr Hawazi Daipi, Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Manpower, said the benchmarks set out are consistent with MOM standards and will help bring the whole industry on board.

Foreign-worker dormitories were thrust into the spotlight, after a two-day illegal strike by SMRT bus drivers from China last month.

Besides wage issues, the drivers complained about poor living conditions.

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The association's adviser, Mr Yeo Guat Kwang, said the set of standards had been worked on for the past three months and the association was registered on Sept 18.

Moving forward, Mr Yeo who is also the chairman of the Migrant Workers' Centre, said the association will visit dormitories and get more operators on board.

MOM statistics showed that there are 722,800 work-permit holders here, excluding maids, as of June.

Foreign workers here also stay in converted industrial premises and workers' quarters on construction sites.

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