

Title : Foreign workers' dormitories could be accredited

By :

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SINGAPORE: Foreign workers' dormitories in Singapore could be accredited from next year, as the industry rolls out plans to raise dormitory standards and living conditions.

The newly formed Dormitory Association of Singapore is putting the scheme in place after releasing a set of benchmarks for dormitory housing on Monday.

The association represents 11 owners and operators of foreign workers' dormitories, which collectively provide more than 100,000 bed spaces or 70 per cent of dormitory spaces in Singapore.

There are 39 approved commercial dormitories for foreign workers as of November 2012.

The benchmarks aim to improve the living conditions in dormitory housing. They cover general living facilities, sanitation, storage and cooking facilities.

The benchmarks were drawn up by the association, the Migrant Workers' Centre and authorities.

Within the next three to six months, the Dormitory Association of Singapore plans to accredit accommodations which adhere to these standards, with the support of the Manpower Ministry and the Migrant Workers' Centre.

The association's secretary-general Simon Lee said he hopes authorities will consider using the accreditation scheme as a licensing condition for all operators.

"Hotel operators need a hotel licence to operate. Dormitory operators currently don't. They do need to meet all the authorities' regulations, but the management of it is actually up to individuals. So we hope that in time to come, we would have some scheme in place to actually let the industry know that this is the standard," he said.

The association added that those accredited would be able to reap benefits such as the pooling of resources.

Other than the regular monitoring of dormitories, chairman of the Migrant Workers' Centre Yeo Guat Kwang said that it is important the association targets smaller operators as well.

The group also plans to work with the authorities to get more land for housing.

"At the moment, roughly, we are able to meet the needs for accommodation for work permit holders. The plan for the future will depend very much on whether the number of foreign workers increases substantially," said Senior Parliamentary Secretary for Manpower Hawazi Daipi.

Meanwhile the National Development Ministry said it will launch new dormitories, depending on the immediate and longer-term demand for foreign worker housing.

The new dormitories will also be more self-contained and have a more conducive living environment.

The ministry said this in response to queries from Channel NewsAsia on the Dormitory Association of Singapore's goal to work with authorities to get more land to build more dorms for workers.

The ministry said there is still strong demand for dormitories. But the speed at which new dormitories can be launched and completed depends on a number of factors.

These include land availability and the time required to prepare the site and infrastructure.

It said that since 2007, the government has been launching new sites for purpose-built dormitories to meet the demand for foreign worker housing.

There are now over 150,000 foreign workers living in such dormitories.

Besides purpose-built dormitories, the ministry said, employers also have other options to house their workers. These include converted industrial properties and workers' quarters in construction sites.

Such premises must comply with requirements to safeguard the well-being of workers, before they can be used as foreign worker housing.

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