



Cayman Islands Government

Statement to Parliament

By

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Minister for Health, Environment
& Sustainability

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Advancing Workplace Health and Safety Across Cayman Islands

Mister Speaker,

As a parent, one of the most important hopes I carry each day is that my family and loved ones leave home in the morning and return safely at the end of the day.

That hope is not mine alone; it is shared by families across our beloved Cayman Islands. It is shared by the spouse who watches a loved one leave for a construction site, and by the child whose parent works around heavy equipment, chemicals, waste management operations, vector control activities, laboratories, public facilities, roads, workshops, or other environments where hazards may exist. It is a hope shared by every family that expects, quite reasonably, that the person they love will return home safely when the working day is done.

Mister Speaker, some events in life are beyond our control. But many workplace injuries, illnesses, exposures, and incidents are preventable when risks are properly identified, managed, monitored, and controlled.

No family should have to receive a call that a loved one has been seriously injured, or worse, because a known hazard was not addressed. No worker should be unknowingly exposed to harmful substances without appropriate controls and protections in place. No employee should feel that their health and wellbeing are secondary to the task at hand.

Today, I rise to speak about a matter that is both practical and deeply human: the health, safety, and wellbeing of our workforce.

This is not simply a compliance issue. It is not merely about rules, checklists, inspections, or procedures. It is about people. It is about families. It is about productivity, public confidence, good governance, and our duty as leaders to protect those whose hard work helps build, sustain and strengthen the Cayman Islands.

The Ministry of Health, Environment and Sustainability, together with colleagues across Government and our wider stakeholders, is committed to strengthening how workplace health and safety is understood, managed, and embedded across the Cayman Islands Government and, ultimately, throughout the Cayman Islands.

Our goal is clear: to move from a culture that reacts after something goes wrong to one that prevents harm before it occurs.

The Reality We Cannot Ignore

Mister Speaker,

Around the world, workplace incidents continue to cause injuries, illnesses, disabilities, and loss of life. High-risk sectors such as construction, waste management, agriculture, transportation, heavy equipment operations, confined space work, chemical handling, and work at height continue to remind us that health and safety risks are real and must be actively managed.

International data shows that construction remains one of the most hazardous sectors, with falls from height, moving vehicles, moving machinery, collapsing materials, and struck-by incidents continuing to be significant causes of serious injury and fatality. Occupational illnesses also continue to affect workers, often developing silently over many years, particularly where exposure to dust, chemicals, fumes, noise, biological agents, or poor ergonomic conditions is not adequately controlled.

These examples are not raised to create fear. They are raised to remind us of a simple truth: many hazards are known, many risks are foreseeable, and many incidents are preventable.

Mister Speaker, we cannot manage what we do not measure.

Across the wider Civil Service, we must strengthen the way we capture, track, analyze, and learn from workplace accidents, incidents, hazards, environmental events, occupational exposures, corrective actions, and near misses.

We must be able to ask and answer important questions:

How many near misses occurred across our Ministries and Departments over the last year?

How many high-potential incidents were reported and investigated?

What environmental incidents occurred, and what lessons were learned?

Which corrective actions remain outstanding?

Were risks identified before they became incidents?

Could hazards have been prevented through better planning, training, equipment, supervision, or systems?

These questions are not intended to assign blame. Rather, they are intended to strengthen accountability, improve decision-making, and ensure that we learn before harm occurs.

One of the key lessons in health and safety is that serious incidents rarely result from a single failure. They occur when multiple weaknesses align: a procedure that is missing, a hazard that is not reported, training that is incomplete, supervision that is inconsistent, equipment that is unsuitable, or leadership oversight that is insufficient.

That is why a strong safety culture matters. It provides multiple layers of protection. It ensures that hazards are identified early, risks are properly assessed, corrective actions are tracked to completion, and workers are empowered to speak up when something is unsafe.

The objective is not to wait until an incident occurs. It is to strengthen each layer of protection so that harm is prevented before it happens.

The Cost of Doing Nothing

Mister Speaker,

There are many high-risk activities carried out across the Cayman Islands that require careful planning, supervision, and control. These include welding and fabrication, pressure testing, excavation and trenching, confined space entry, chemical handling, respiratory protection, sandblasting, pressurized spray painting, heavy equipment operations, rigging and lifting, quarrying, waste management, vector control operations, and work at height.

Where these activities are not properly managed, the consequences can be severe.

For example,

Welding fumes are recognized as a human carcinogen internationally and have been linked to lung cancer, chronic respiratory illnesses, and other long-term health conditions. Without appropriate controls such as ventilation and respiratory protection, workers may unknowingly expose themselves to harmful fumes day after day, with the effects often not becoming apparent until years later.

The human cost is the most important. A workplace injury does not end at the workplace; it follows a worker home and affects families. It can impact a person's ability to earn and provide, to care for loved ones, to participate fully in community life, and to live with dignity.

There is also an organizational cost. When health and safety are not treated as a priority, organizations can experience reduced morale, increased absenteeism, lower productivity, higher staff turnover, increased compensation costs, greater liability, and a loss of trust.

There is also a national cost. Workplace injuries and illnesses place pressure on our healthcare system, reduce productivity, increase insurance and compensation costs, and affect families, communities, businesses, and public services.

Mister Speaker, prevention is better than cure. But in health and safety, prevention is also better governance, better leadership, better economics, and better public service.

The cost of prevention will always be less than the cost of failure.

A Vision for a Safer Cayman Islands

Mister Speaker,

Our vision is to cultivate a proactive, resilient, and accountable safety culture within the Ministry of Health, Environment and Sustainability, across the Cayman Islands Government, and ultimately throughout the Cayman Islands.

This vision is one in which effective risk management, leadership accountability, worker engagement, good governance, and continuous improvement are embedded in everyday operations. It is a vision in which safety is not viewed as an administrative burden, but as a core value.

We envision workplaces where leaders visibly demonstrate their commitment to health and safety; where employees are equipped to recognize hazards; where workers feel empowered to report concerns without fear; where risks are assessed before work begins; where corrective actions are implemented and followed through; and where lessons learned are shared and applied.

This approach aligns strongly with the Government's commitment to efficient, accountable, and people-centered public services. It supports health and social development, strengthens public service delivery, and reinforces good governance and public safety.

Mister Speaker, a modern Civil Service must not only deliver services; it must deliver them safely, responsibly, and sustainably.

The Work Already Underway Within MHES

Mister Speaker,

This vision is not merely aspirational. Work is already underway.

The Ministry of Health, Environment and Sustainability has begun the design, implementation, and integration of key elements of a Health, Safety

and Environment or HSE Management System, aligned with recognized international standards, including those set by the International Organization for Standardization, ISO 45001, the global standard for occupational health and safety management systems.

For those who may be unfamiliar, such a management system provides a structured approach to identifying hazards, managing risks, preventing work-related injuries and illnesses, improving accountability, and continuously strengthening health and safety performance.

As of February 2026, the implementation of a Health, Safety and Environment Management System has been formally incorporated into the MHES Strategic Plan Roadmap and is being actively progressed across the Ministry.

To support this initiative, the Ministry has developed a suite of Health, Safety and Environment standard operating procedures, together with supporting forms and documentation. These are intended to establish a structured and consistent framework across entities under the Ministry, beginning with the Department of Environmental Health.

Key procedures developed and currently undergoing stakeholder review include:

1. Incident Notification and Escalation;
2. Respiratory Protection Programme;
3. Selection and Use of Personal Protective Equipment;
4. Risk Management Programme;

5. Health, Safety and Environment (HSE) Performance Measurement and Reporting;
6. Safety and Health Roles and Responsibilities; and
7. Health, Safety and Environment (HSE) Inspections, Monitoring, Assessment, and Improvement.

These are not merely administrative documents. They are practical tools designed to support safer work practices, clearer accountability, improved reporting, stronger supervision, and better decision-making.

The Ministry is also progressing the procurement of a centralized HSE management software solution. This will support more effective reporting, tracking, analysis, and management of incidents, hazards, corrective actions, inspections, risk assessments, and performance indicators.

This is important because good data leads to better decisions. Better decisions lead to stronger prevention and stronger prevention protects lives.

In addition, the Ministry is finalizing HSE culture surveys for two high-risk departments: the Mosquito Research and Control Unit and the Department of Environmental Health. These surveys will help us better understand current safety culture, employee perceptions, existing gaps, and opportunities for improvement.

Before we can lead change effectively, we must listen. We must understand the experiences of our workers. We must know where the risks lie, where our systems are strong, and where improvements are needed.

MRCU: A Practical Story of Progress

Mister Speaker,

The Ministry's current direction is not based on theory alone; it is grounded in practical experience and informed by lessons learned in the field.

One of the clearest examples can be found within the Mosquito Research and Control Unit, known to many as MRCU.

In May 2023, a Safety and Compliance Officer was appointed within MRCU, bringing a dedicated focus to risk management and the development of effective management systems. Shortly thereafter, a comprehensive assessment of the MRCU Main Facility was undertaken to establish a clear understanding of the existing health and safety landscape and to identify opportunities for improvement.

That assessment included a Health and Safety Gap Analysis and a Facility Audit Observation. The findings revealed that many of the foundational elements of an effective Health, Safety and Environment Management System were either absent or underdeveloped. At the time, the overall level of compliance was approximately 3%.

Mister Speaker, this is not shared as a criticism. It is shared as an example of transparency, leadership, and a commitment to continuous improvement.

What matters most is what happened next.

Through the commitment of MRCU leadership and employees, supported by a structured HSE Management System approach, the department achieved significant progress over the following two years. Its level of compliance increased from approximately 3% to around 40%, while many of the key building blocks necessary to support continuous improvement were established.

More importantly, this work contributed to a significant and measurable improvement in safety awareness, accountability, and employee engagement.

Key achievements included the development and implementation of a comprehensive HSE induction programme for both new and existing employees, together with the creation of HSE standard operating procedures and work instructions.

Formal processes for the reporting and investigation of accidents, incidents, and near misses were established, supported by monthly HSE performance reporting and the systematic tracking of corrective actions.

The department also implemented respiratory fit-testing training and competency assessments; task-based risk assessments for employees and contractors; a Behavior-Based Safety Observation Programme; a formal Health and Safety Committee; routine HSE meetings and toolbox talks; facility inspections and audits, and emergency response drills.

Mister Speaker, these improvements did not occur overnight. Nor were they the result of documents alone. They were made possible through

leadership commitment, employee participation, accountability, and a shared understanding that health and safety is everyone's responsibility.

The lesson from MRCU is clear: when leadership sets the direction, when employees are engaged, when effective systems are put in place, and when performance is monitored, meaningful and sustainable improvement is possible.

MRCU demonstrates that a structured and proactive approach can strengthen organizational culture, improve risk management, enhance employee wellbeing, and support operational effectiveness.

That is precisely the kind of progress we intend to build upon across the wider Civil Service.

A Government-Wide Opportunity

Mister Speaker,

The Ministry of Health, Environment and Sustainability intends to lead by example and serve as a pilot for the design, implementation, and

integration of a comprehensive Health, Safety and Environment Management System.

This work will begin within the Ministry, with priority given to higher-risk operational areas, followed by medium-risk and lower-risk functions. This phased, risk-based approach will ensure that resources are directed where they are needed most, while allowing lessons learned to be captured, shared and applied.

But the vision does not stop with the Ministry.

Through this initiative, MHES intends not only to strengthen health and safety across its departments and authorities, but also to establish a practical, documented, and adaptable framework that can support broader adoption across the Cayman Islands Government.

Achieving this vision will require collaboration across Ministries, Portfolios, Departments, Statutory Authorities, Government Companies, and the wider public sector. It will also require meaningful engagement with employees, supervisors, technical professionals, and stakeholders throughout the Cayman Islands.

Mister Speaker, as we engage with the Workplace Safety Committee later this month, we do so with a clear message: the Government is committed to advancing workplace health and safety in a practical, collaborative and sustainable manner.

We recognize that the most effective safety systems are not imposed from a distance; they are built through consultation, participation, leadership, and shared responsibility.

This is not a one-Ministry issue. It is a government-wide opportunity and, over time, a national opportunity.

As we strengthen safety culture within Government, we are also taking important steps to modernize the national framework for workplace health and safety.

The Need for Primary Workplace Health and Safety Legislation

Mister Speaker,

Strong systems are essential, but they must also be supported by a clear, modern, and effective legislative framework.

Existing provisions provide an important foundation, including the Labour Act, the Labour Occupational Safety and Health Construction Industry Regulations, the Public Service Management Act, and the Personnel Regulations.

However, the nature of work has changed. The risks faced by workers have evolved. The expectations of modern governance have increased. Our legislative framework must therefore continue to evolve as well.

That is why the Ministry is leading work toward the development of primary workplace health and safety legislation, supported by a modern regulatory framework.

This legislation must be practical, proportionate, and relevant to the Cayman Islands. It must strengthen protections for workers while providing clarity for employers, managers, supervisors, and duty holders. It must also support prevention, competency, effective reporting, and stronger accountability across both the public and private sectors.

Mister Speaker, the purpose of legislation is not to punish responsible employers or burden organizations that are seeking to do the right thing. Its purpose is to create clarity, consistency, minimum standards, and a framework that supports prevention.

Modern workplace health and safety legislation will help ensure that safety is not left to chance, personality, custom, or informal practice. It will ensure that the protection of workers is embedded in law, supported by regulation, and reinforced through leadership and accountability.

This is how we protect workers today, and how we safeguard the wellbeing of future generations of Caymanians and residents.

The Economic and Social Case for Safety

Mister Speaker,

There can be no price placed on the life, health, and wellbeing of our people.

But we must also recognize that investment in workplace health and safety delivers real social and economic benefits.

It protects workers and families, reduces injuries and occupational exposures, improves morale and productivity, reduces absenteeism and organizational disruption, strengthens governance, builds trust, and supports a more resilient economy. Most importantly, it gives every worker the best possible chance of returning home safely at the end of each day.

Mister Speaker, good health and safety is not a cost to be avoided; it is an investment in people, performance, productivity, and national wellbeing.

A Call to Leadership

Mister Speaker,

Transformative change of this nature cannot be achieved by policy alone. It requires leadership.

It requires leaders who are willing to ask difficult questions, listen to workers, identify gaps, provide resources, support training, insist on accountability, and lead by example.

It requires supervisors who understand that safety is not separate from operational excellence, but central to it.

It requires employees who are empowered to speak up when something is unsafe.

It requires systems that record hazards, track actions, investigate incidents, and ensure lessons are learned.

It requires a culture in which reporting a hazard is seen not as a complaint, but as a contribution to prevention.

Mister Speaker, health and safety must be embedded in how we plan, procure, train, supervise, manage performance, and deliver public services.

The Ministry of Health, Environment and Sustainability is committed to leading by example, strengthening our own systems, supporting wider Government learning and working with the Workplace Safety Committee and other stakeholders. We are committed to advancing primary workplace health and safety legislation and to helping build a safer Cayman Islands.

Let us be clear: this is not about creating a culture of fear. It is about fostering a culture of care, responsibility, accountability, and prevention.

It is about ensuring that the worker on a construction site, the employee handling chemicals, the officer in the field, the person operating equipment, the team member conducting inspections, the contractor undertaking maintenance, and the public servant delivering essential services all know that their safety matters.

Mister Speaker, the measure of our progress will not only be found in policies approved or systems implemented; it will be found in injuries

prevented, risks reduced, workers protected, families spared tragedy, and communities strengthened.

At the beginning of these remarks, I spoke about a hope shared by every parent, spouse, child, and family across our Islands: that the people we love will leave home in the morning and return safely at the end of the day.

That expectation is neither unreasonable nor ambitious. It is fundamental.

Every worker deserves to return home safely.

Every family deserves that reassurance.

And every leader has a responsibility to help make that expectation a reality.

Thank you, Mister Speaker.