

Beef up beach safety

Published on: Feb 8, 2012 @ 7:33

## Wednesday February 8, 2012, The Star Online

THE number of drowning cases in the country is worrying. According to the Fire and Rescue Department, 303 cases were recorded in 2011 and 331 in 2010. In Pahang alone, 28 people drowned from 2008 until last January. The number of cases in other states is also alarming.

Beaches can and often provide a range of opportunities for community health and wellbeing. The beach offers social, environmental and physical health and fitness opportunities.

However, the beach also has hazards that can present a risk to the ill-informed, uneducated or those who may choose to ignore, disregard or who misjudge a situation.

The issues surrounding community/public safety have become of greater importance. However, the specifics of beach safety have not been addressed properly and public safety at the beach tend to be the forgotten issue while considerable attention is given to environment protection and others.

We need a strategy for safe beaches, free from drowning. It is not about stopping people from having fun or preventing them from being in, on, under and around water. We want them to be safe while doing so.

There are many factors which cause drowning, such as unrestricted and ready access to beaches, lack of knowledge and understanding of the water conditions, ignorance, disregard or misjudgment of hazardous water conditions, absence of constant visual supervision and, particularly, lack of awareness and education in water safety, personal survival and life-saving.

Beach safety and risk management strategies are crucial to ensure the reduction of death by drowning. The implementation of an effective risk management programme can reduce the incidence of death at our beaches.

It is the responsibility of those organisations, agencies and authorities with jurisdiction over beaches to identify, and preferably minimise, the risks of injury or death by drowning.

This responsibility is not sufficiently satisfied by installing signs or providing safety equipment.

We should advocate proper supervision of beaches and other water attractions, support legislation that requires the use of personal flotation devices to be worn at beaches and educate parents on the need for close supervision of children at beaches.

The time has come for all relevant agencies and authorities to beef up safety along all beaches throughout the country.

Apart from that, education on safe practices during water activities and making safe decisions about water-related activities and to appropriately manage water-related hazards are among the prevention strategies we can adopt.

**TAN SRI LEE LAM THYE,**

**Chairman,**

**National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health.**