

42 unions demand more safety

REPRESENTATIVES of 42 trade unions this morning urged the Office of Unofficial Members of the Executive and Legislative Councils (Ume'co) to speed up industrial safety measures in the factories.

They submitted a letter to the Councillors demanding action to decrease the high rate of industrial accidents.

Union spokesman Mr Lau Tin-shek, the Director of the Christian Industrial Committee, said the Labour Department should increase the number of inspectors from the present 140 to 250 and should increase the number of spot checks on factories' safety measures.

The Government should also offer more education on industrial safety.

The Government should impose tougher penalties on employers who do not meet industrial safety standards, he said, and there should also be more education on industrial safety.

He said the maximum fine for neglecting safety regulations should be raised to \$50,000.

COMPULSORY insurance for workers' compensation is being considered by the Government.

The Acting Assistant Commissioner for Labour, Mr Yiu Yan-nang, said it was hoped a decision would be arrived at soon.

He was replying to suggestions by student organisations on compensation and industrial safety.

Mr Yiu said a Bill on workmen's compensation was expected to go before the Legislative Council during the current session.

The Labour Department intended to review levels of compensation twice a year to make adjustments for inflation and other factors.

But Mr Yiu was not convinced the need existed for a separate emergency fund for workers injured at work.

The Workmen's Compensation Ordinance made provision for two-thirds wages to be paid during temporary incapacity and the payment of medical expenses.

Any case of financial hardship coming to the Labour Department's notice was referred to the Social Welfare Department for help.

On the adjudication of workmen's compensation, Mr Yiu said that a working party in 1978 had not considered it advisable to transfer responsibility from the District Court to the Labour Tribunal.

Mr Yiu said the Department would continue to vigorously enforce prosecutions against those who broke safety laws.

The severity of punishments for offenders was a matter for the courts to decide but experience had shown more severe penalties were being handed out to repeated offenders.

He said the education of workers on industrial safety had always been an important aspect of the factory inspectorates work.

He also pointed out that plans were in hand to increase the number of factory inspectors from 140 to 250 by 1984.

A spokesman for the unions, Mr Leung Po-lam, said last night the Labour Department's reply was "neither new nor definite".

Mr Leung said the Government should have enforced compulsory insurance for workmen's compensation years ago.

He said many employers had taken advantage of the present Workmen's Compensation Ordinance in delaying payment to injured workers and relatives of those who died in industrial accidents.

Mr Leung cited one example in which the relatives of a dead worker had to wrangle in a civil action for more than 18 months before they got compensation from the employer.

Mr Leung reiterated their demands for a social insurance scheme for all workers in Hongkong.