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Workers' rights get new boost

Workers in Guangdong province, under a new regulation, will now have the right to claim compensation for work-related injuries or sickness within two years of ceasing employment.

Zhang Xiang, a publicity official of the provincial labor and security department, said yesterday the introduction of the new regulation "is partly due an illness suffered by a woman worker in Shunde district, Foshan city".

The worker, Ye Biqiong, was employed by a packaging factory in Foshan in 1993.

Ye's employer purchased insurance against injury for her in 2000.

Ye quit her job in 2006 because of illness.

In 2007, Ye was diagnosed with serious benzene poisoning, which had been certified as being caused by her work at the factory.

Ye and her former employer tried to claim work injury compensation from the social insurance fund bureau of Shunde, but they were turned down.

The reason being Ye had left the factory before she was diagnosed with the disease.

In May this year, Ye and her former employer brought the bureau to court.

The case drew wide media attention, and the provincial government began to realize that many other people in Guangdong province were in a similar position to Ye, Zhang said.

The director of the Guangdong prevention and treatment center for occupational diseases, Huang Hanlin, the attorney of Ye, Huang Shumei, and a law professor of Sun Yat-sen University, Huang Qiaoyan, also jointly sent a petition letter to the provincial government suggesting that it require the labor and social security department improve its injury compensation regulation.

Under the new regulation a worker who has been diagnosed as having contracted an occupational disease can claim insurance compensation from the labor and social security department even though no longer employed.

The only precondition is that the claim must be made within two years.

The provincial labor and social security department said it released an official announcement on Saturday, and the new regulation would take effect from that day.

"The Shunde branch of the Foshan social insurance fund bureau has accepted Ye's case and we have withdrawn our lawsuit," attorney Huang Shumei said.

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