

# South Korea: Unionised workers call for Hanwha Ocean CEO to be jailed over yard death

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## Subcontractor lost his life in fatal workshop blast

Hanwha Ocean's unionised workers have reportedly asked the South Korean authorities to arrest the offshore and marine company's chief executive Hyek Woong Kwon following the recent fatal accident at its Okpo yard on Geoje Island.

These workers alleged that management has been keener to resume operations since the incident rather than making efforts to prevent similar accidents, according to The Korea Times.

"Since the Serious Accidents Punishment Act (SAPA) took effect, five fatal industrial accidents happened at DSME (Daewoo Shipbuilding & Marine Engineering), so we hoped that the shipyard would be safer after Hanwha's acquisition seven months ago," a union representative told local media at a press conference.

However, a subcontractor in his late 20s last Friday lost his life after an explosion occurred in the rudder workshop at Hanwha Ocean's Okpo yard where he was grinding. He was thrown by the blast and hit by debris, and later died in hospital.

South Korea's SAPA legislation, which was implemented two years ago, states that a company's chief executive can be imprisoned if a serious workplace accident occurs, and the company has failed to implement adequate safety measures.

"The labour ministry should order Hanwha Ocean to cease all operations at its worksites nationwide and should carry out a special labour inspection of the company," the union said.

"Hanwha Ocean should allow the union to join the inspection of its health and safety systems and reinforce safety managers at workplaces."

The ministry is investigating whether the contractor violated the SAPA, added The Korea Times.

Hanwha Ocean had not responded to an Upstream request for comment on the union's stance at the time of publication.

While the name and the nationality of the worker who died at Hanwha Ocean are not known to have been made public, the nation's yards are increasingly relying on overseas workers to help keep them competitive, not least against rivals in China.

However, a survey last year by the Korean Metal Workers' Union (KMWU) found that more than six out of 10 migrant workers at South Korea's HD Hyundai Heavy Industries, Hyundai Mipo Dockyard,

Hyundai Samho Heavy Industries and Hanwha Ocean intended to change their jobs to sectors other than marine and offshore. The reasons given included low pay — typically less than their South Korean counterparts — and strict labour conditions. Also, 23.9% of the KMWU's survey respondents expressed their concern over workplace safety, The Korea Times earlier reported.

Hanwha Ocean on Tuesday received a notice of work stoppage order from the Ministry of Employment and Labour for two of its parts manufacturing plants. The day before, the contractor had halted production at its Okpo yard — stating that work was scheduled to resume after the accident investigation determines the cause [of the fatal incident] and prepares countermeasures.

A Seoul court in 2012 jailed the-then chairman of the Hanwha Group, Kim Seung-youn, for using group affiliates to “unfairly support” companies that he owned. Kim was also fined more than \$4 million for breach of trust and other offences.

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