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Title : Construction firms can apply for funds from June to boost productivity

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SINGAPORE: From June, construction firms will be able to tap into various schemes to boost productivity.

These schemes were announced in March under the S\$250 million Construction Productivity and Capability Fund.

The money which comes from the newly-created National Productivity Fund will go to seven schemes in areas like manpower development and skills upgrading.

One local construction firm has moved from the old paint rollers to let the machine do the job faster and better.

This is one of the newer technologies that the company has invested in, making them eligible for more grants of up to 50 per cent under the Mechanisation Credit Scheme.

Peh Ke-Pin, director, PQ Holdings Pte Ltd, said: "For the Bartley viaduct that we've completed, we only deployed two to four workers and with two spray machines, we can complete the job. For the conventional normal roller method, we will require about eight to 10 men to complete the same job."

PQ Holdings also hopes to tap a scheme that will offset 80 per cent of fees to train its staff.

Mr Peh said: "In the past, we had to bear all these costs and it's very taxing on SMEs like us. Now, with the government funding, I think I will not just send only those privileged few. We'll probably have a proper training roadmap even for workers and those supervisors to project management levels."

Another scheme rolled out by the Building and Construction Authority (BCA) is the Environment Scholarship.

BCA will pay 50 per cent of the annual minimum scholarship sum of S\$14,000 for each Singaporean or PR scholar.

Others are teaming up with the BCA and construction companies to embark on a Productivity Improvement Project. They are going to explore how a newly-developed concrete can help boost productivity.

Dr Sujit Ghosh, CEO, Holcim Singapore, said: "It basically reduces the time you spend in pouring the concrete by almost a quarter and the manpower needs were also measured to be a quarter. So, basically the productivity enhancement is 15, 16 times."

Under this scheme, the government will support up to 50 per cent of the qualifying costs or up to S\$100,000, whichever is lower.

Higher grants will be given for group or industry-wide projects. The project will be funded if it improves productivity by at least 20 per cent.

So far, more than 2,000 firms have been briefed on the various grants. The BCA has received more than 300 enquiries.

But some industry players said the S\$250 million funding may not be enough to cater to the 10,000 construction firms here and BCA said it will have to ask for more funding if it ever comes to that.

All eyes are on the construction sector in the government's effort to improve productivity. This is because it has been lagging behind in terms of achieving optimal productivity and it's vital to do so because the construction industry is a key pillar of Singapore's economy. - CNA/vm

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