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\$30m grant to help automate cleaning and waste management



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SINGAPORE - Building owners and businesses can now tap a \$30 million grant to offset the costs of adopting tools and technologies that mechanise cleaning and waste management tasks.

For instance, they can use the money for equipment such as autonomous floor cleaners and smart litter bins with inbuilt compactors that can handle about five times more rubbish than a regular bin of a similar size.

The productivity solutions grant for the environmental services industry, which was launched by Senior Minister of State for the Environment and Water Resources Amy Khor on Monday (Sept 17), will be available until Jan 31, 2020.

The grant aims to encourage business and premises owners to adopt technologies that will increase operational efficiency and productivity, as part of efforts to make the industry manpower-lean.

As demand for environmental services continues to rise, increasing the number of workers to meet demand is "unsustainable given our manpower constraints", said Dr Khor on the sidelines of an event to raise awareness among cleaning service providers of the benefits of job redesign.

Noting that the average age of workers in the cleaning sector is 60, Dr Khor said that rather than replacing older workers, technology can help make their jobs less physically challenging.

"Repetitive and laborious tasks can be reduced using automation, and workers can focus on higher value-added jobs," she said.

Licensed waste management and cleaning companies with existing contracts in Singapore as well as building and facility owners that are eligible for the grant may receive up to half of qualifying costs or up to \$250,000 per company.

The productivity solutions grant complements the existing WorkPro Job Redesign grant by Workforce Singapore, which helps to defray implementation costs incurred by cleaning companies in adopting solutions that will benefit workers aged 50 and above.



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More than 50 cleaning companies have tapped the job redesign grant since July 2016, benefiting close to 1,400 older workers, Dr Khor said.

Workers at Lifeline Cleaning, for example, now use tools such as automated road sweepers and battery-operated carts for rubbish collection and disposal.

As a result, the firm has reduced operating costs without cutting its number of workers, said its senior business development manager Roy Tan.

About 80 per cent of Lifeline's cleaners are above 50, and manual labour can be taxing on them, said Mr Tan.

"The machinery has to be operated by humans regardless of how high tech it is... We wanted to improve the working conditions of the cleaners as well as the retention rate," he said.

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