

Govt cancels STOW requirement



File: Minister of Energy, Dr Roodal Moonilal

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The government has cancelled the Safe To Work (STOW) certification requirement for access to the energy sector, ending a system that, it says, imposed unfair costs and barriers to local businesses, particularly small and medium-sized enterprises.

Energy Minister Dr Roodal Moonilal announced the decision yesterday at a post-Cabinet news conference, explaining that the move gives effect to a commitment made by Prime Minister Kamla Persad-Bissessar in 2024, when she was Opposition Leader.

During the Budget debate for 2025 fiscal year, Persad-Bissessar pledged that a future UNC administration would terminate the STOW regime and revert to the occupational health and safety codes that existed prior to its introduction.

Moonilal reminded the media that the Prime Minister has long argued that the STOW system was not grounded in law and evolved instead from agreements involving the Energy Chamber, multinational energy companies and certain state enterprises.

She had also warned that the certification process could cost businesses hundreds of thousands of dollars, with approval granted for only one or two years before mandatory recertification.

The Energy Minister told the media that STOW “forms no part of the laws of Trinidad and Tobago,” explaining that it came into being through “some type of agreement, charter, between the Energy Chamber and several of the multinational energy companies,” with the involvement of state enterprises.

Following consultations with energy companies, he reported that “a decision has been arrived at to terminate, to discontinue the STOW requirement and revert to the ISO codes and other relevant codes that obtained before”.

The minister said the certification framework has become a barrier to entry, particularly for small and medium-sized contractors and new market entrants, while enriching a limited group of entities.

He maintained that the government’s position on STOW had been consistent since 2024 and was clearly articulated in the UNC’s election manifesto, well before the party returned to office.

The STOW framework was designed as a pre-qualification system, requiring service providers to meet minimum health, safety and environmental standards before bidding for energy contracts.

Certification was issued for one or two years, depending on assessment scores across several elements and a physical conditions tour of worksites.

On its website, the Energy Chamber explained that companies seeking certification were required to apply through the chamber and pay a series of fees. An application fee was payable to the Energy Chamber, with rates varying by membership status and risk category.

Low-risk member companies paid \$1,000 plus VAT, while high-risk members paid \$3,000 plus VAT. Non-members paid between \$1,250 plus VAT for low-risk operations and \$5,000 plus VAT for high-risk companies.

Audit fees were also paid to the Energy Chamber and were based on the length of the assessment, which could range from four to eight days depending on the size and complexity of the business. Assessors were paid daily rates of \$3,000 plus VAT for senior assessors and \$2,000 plus VAT for independent assessors. A further certification fee of \$1,000 plus VAT was payable before the STOW certificate was issued.

Moonilal said these cumulative costs helped to explain why the Government moved to cancel the STOW requirement.

Efforts to contact Energy Chamber CEO Dr Thackwray Driver for comment up to press time proved futile.