

Examination of Estimates of Expenditure 2011-12

Reply Serial No.

**CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY TO
INITIAL WRITTEN QUESTION**

DEVB(PL)113

Question Serial No.

Head : 82 Buildings Department Subhead (No. & title) :

0474

Programme : Buildings and Building Works

Controlling Officer : Director of Buildings

Director of Bureau : Secretary for Development

Question :

The Joint Office (JO) established by the Buildings Department and the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department is dedicated to handling complaints on water seepage in buildings. According to the working procedure of the JO, it will acknowledge a water seepage complaint within three working days after receipt of the same, and contact the complainant within six working days to arrange to conduct investigation. If the investigation is completed within three weeks after receipt of the complaint, a detailed reply will be given to the complainant. Otherwise, a reply will be issued within one month after acknowledgement of the complaint and at appropriate intervals afterwards to inform the complainant of the progress of the investigation. In this connection, will the Administration inform this Committee that in each of the past three years, for the water seepage complaints which required investigation, what was the percentage of cases with investigations completed within three weeks after receipt of the complaints?

Asked by : Hon. LEE Wai-king, Starry

Reply :

The Joint Office (JO) has been developing internal working guidelines and milestones to monitor the progress of various stages of investigation. However, identification of the possible source(s) of water seepage is not a straightforward matter and is often complicated by the fact that there may be more than one possible source of water seepage in a single case. As a result, a series of non-destructive tests have to be performed to establish the sources of seepage and this will require the time and patience of all parties, especially those of the owners/occupiers concerned. Cooperation of all owners/occupiers involved is critical for JO staff to enter their premises and conduct multiple tests to identify the source of water seepage. With the full cooperation of concerned parties, an investigation can normally be concluded within around 130 days (90 working days). However, in many cases, repeated arrangements have to be made with the complainants on the timing for site inspections and consents of respondents

have to be sought in allowing multiple inspections inside their premises. It will take an even longer time if the JO has to apply to the Court for a warrant to gain entry into the premises concerned for investigation. The JO does not keep separate statistics on the percentage of cases with investigations completed within three weeks after receipt of the complaints.

We have been exploring means to enhance the JO's efficiency by reviewing its modus operandi, investigation methods and resource situation. For instance, the Buildings Department awarded longer contracts to its outsourced consultants in 2010 with a view to reducing the impact of turnover and length of the learning period. The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department is also making arrangements to replace a number of ENIs with Health Inspectors (HIs). These HIs are civil servants (as opposed to ENIs who are non-civil service contract staff) and will be deployed to the JO from mid-June 2011. With more experience accumulated, we expect that these HIs would speed up the processing of water seepage cases. The deployment of HIs would also help reduce the staff turnover of the JO.

With the above arrangements, we will continue to review the internal milestones against the JO's performance. Our goal is to develop the same into performance pledges. Nevertheless, the Office at this stage does not have formal performance pledges as mentioned in the question and hence does not have the statistics required in the question.

Signature _____

Name in block letters AU Choi-kai

Post Title Director of Buildings

Date 17.3.2011