

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

Head: 82 Buildings Department

Subhead (No. & title):

Programme: Buildings and Building Works

Controlling Officer: Director of Buildings

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Development

Question:

- (a) Since the Buildings Department established the Joint Office (JO) with the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department in 2006, how many water seepage complaints have been received each year? Generally speaking, what is the working procedure of the JO for handling these complaints and how much time is needed? Among these complaints, how many cases have been successfully handled or have the source of seepage been identified? Has the JO ever applied to the Court for warrants to enter the premises suspected to cause the seepage for investigation? If yes, please provide the number of cases.
- (b) What is the staffing provision and operational expenditure for the JO each year? Will the Government review the effectiveness and modus operandi of the JO and adopt improvement measures accordingly? If yes, what are the details? If no, what are the reasons?
- (c) On extending the operation of the JO for two years, will the Government allocate more resources (e.g. employ additional staff) for improving the JO's performance in complaint handling so as to expedite the processing of the complaints, improve the success rate of investigation and shorten the time for processing the complaints? If yes, what are the details? If no, what are the reasons? What is the estimated amount of expenditure and staffing provision for the JO each year? When the operation of the pilot JO expires in two years, by what means will the Government continue the vision and work of the JO?
- (d) What equipment is being used by the JO to conduct water seepage tests? Will the JO procure more advanced equipment next year to improve the efficiency and

success rate in handling water seepage complaints? If yes, what are the details? If no, what are the reasons?

Asked by: Hon. CHAN Tanya

Reply:

Water seepage in private premises is primarily a matter of building management and maintenance for property owners. However, if the problem of water seepage causes public health nuisance, building structural safety risks or wastage of water, the Government will consider intervention by exercising the relevant statutory powers. To facilitate action, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department and the Buildings Department (BD) have established the Joint Office (JO) as a pilot programme since 2006 to co-ordinate investigation of complaints and taking of enforcement actions.

The statistics on the numbers of water seepage cases received, cases handled, cases with source identified as well as the number of applications to the Court for entry warrants from 2006 to 2011 are tabulated below :

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Number of cases received	12 733	17 405	21 717	21 769	25 717	23 660
Number of cases handled	7 294	13 375	16 708	18 237	22 971	23 210
Number of cases with source identified	1 430	3 452	4 476	4 813	4 737	4 199
Number of applications to the Court for entry warrants	-	18	70	120	136	90

Identification of the possible sources of water seepage is not a straightforward matter and is often complicated by the fact that there may be multiple sources of water seepage in a single case. As a result, a series of non-destructive tests may have to be performed with a view to identifying the source of seepage and this will require the time and understanding of all parties, especially the owners/occupiers concerned. Co-operation 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 co-operation 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 consent of owners/occupiers has to be sought to allow multiple inspections inside their premises. It will take even longer time if the JO has to apply to the Court for a warrant to gain entry into the premises concerned for investigation. Based on our experience, such cases generally each takes about 170 days from the receipt of a complaint to the completion of an investigation.

The operation of the JO involves a provision of 60 professional and technical staff from the BD, at a projected expenditure of about \$35 million in 2011-12. The two-year extension of the programme from 2012-13 will involve provision of additional resources, at an estimated expenditure of about \$49 million per year. The Administration has been monitoring the work of the JO and will review its long term role, organisation and staffing to ensure effective enforcement of the law and efficient operation of the JO.

The source of water seepage can be varied. Hence, depending on individual circumstances, the JO will employ different methods of investigation. In this connection, moisture meters and colour dyes are commonly adopted in the JO's investigation work. The BD endeavours to keep abreast of the latest technological developments and is working with the Applied Science and Technology Research Institute to explore more effective investigation methods so as to enhance the JO's capability in handling water seepage complaints.

Signature _____

Name in block letters _____ AU Choi-kai _____

Post Title _____ Director of Buildings _____

Date _____ 28.2.2012 _____