

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

DEVB(PL)095

Question Serial No.

1434

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

Programme: Buildings and Building Works

Controlling Officer: Director of Buildings

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Development

Question:

As indicated under "Matters Requiring Special Attention in 2013-14", the Administration will continue the large scale operation on removal of large unauthorised signboards. According to information available, about 10 years will be required to remove all the unauthorised signboards. Please advise:

1. What were the staff establishment and expenditure in 2012-13? And those estimated in 2013-14?
2. Regarding the staff establishment currently responsible for the removal operation, please list respectively the number of civil servants, non-civil service contract staff and staff of outsourced services. With the current establishment, will the Administration be able to complete the operation as scheduled? Will consideration be given to recruiting more staff in order to remove the remaining signboards as early as possible? If so, what is the estimated number of additional staff required?

Asked by: Hon. LO Wai-kwok

Reply:

(1) and (2)

Apart from taking necessary action upon receiving reports on unauthorised signboards from the public, the Buildings Department (BD) has also launched a large scale operation (LSO) against large unauthorised signboards.

The LSO on removal of large unauthorised signboards was carried out in 2012-13 using the existing resources of 19 professional and technical staff of the Signboard Control Unit of the BD. The 19 professional and technical staff comprise seven civil service staff and 12 non-civil service contract staff.

The existing resources of 530 professional and technical staff, comprising 377 civil service staff and 153 non-civil service contract staff, in the two Existing Buildings Divisions and the Mandatory Building Inspection Division of the BD are also responsible for taking enforcement action against dangerous/abandoned signboards and unauthorised signboards as part of their overall duties to implement the BD's building safety and maintenance enforcement programme. We are thus not able to provide a breakdown of the manpower and expenditure solely for removal of unauthorised signboards. Also, the BD does not keep statistics on the number of staff employed by its outsourced consultants.

The LSO and the enforcement action against unauthorised signboards will continue to be carried out in 2013-14 using the existing resources. There is no plan to increase the professional and technical manpower for these tasks at this stage. We do not have a specific target on the timeframe for removal of all the unauthorised signboards.

In view of the fact that many of the unauthorised signboards are in active use by business operations and their existence serves a useful purpose of sustaining local commercial activities, the Administration plans to introduce legislative amendments to the Building (Minor Works) Regulation in 2013 to implement the Signboard Control System (SBCS). Under the SBCS, the continued use of existing unauthorised signboards that meet certain criteria (e.g. within stipulated dimensional requirements, not blocking the operation of emergency vehicles, etc.) will be allowed after safety checks, strengthening (if necessary) and certification by registered building professionals or registered contractors. The safety check and certification have to be conducted once every five years. Unauthorised signboards not joining the SBCS will be subject to the BD's enforcement action.

Name in block letters: AU Choi-kai
Post Title: Director of Buildings
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