

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

DEVB(PL)098

Question Serial No.

2485

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

Programme: Buildings and Building Works

Controlling Officer: Director of Buildings

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Development

Question:

It is mentioned in bullet point 3 under paragraph 6 in the Brief Description that the Buildings Department “will continue the operation of the pilot Joint Office (JO) with the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) to handle public reports about water seepage problems for another two years from 2012-13.” Please advise this Committee of the following:

- a. The number of staff in different grades and ranks in the JO (including staff of the FEHD) and the expenditure involved for the financial year 2013-14;
- b. The number of staff of the contractors hired by the JO and the expenditure involved;
- c. The number of cases processed by the JO annually over the past three years (i.e. the financial years 2010-11, 2011-12 and 2012-13). Please list the respective number of cases with the source of seepage identified and not identified, and also the number of cases prosecuted;
- d. The measures adopted to enhance the efficiency of the JO and help assistance seekers to identify the source of seepage as soon as possible; and
- e. The reasons and rationale for extending the JO for two years.

Asked by: Hon. MA Fung-kwok

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 (FEHD) and the Buildings Department (BD) have established the Joint Office (JO) as a pilot programme since 2006 to co-ordinate investigation of reports on water seepage and taking of enforcement actions.

- (a) & (b) In 2013-14, the operation of the JO involves the provision of 64 professional and technical staff from the BD, the provision of 219 investigation staff from the FEHD and an estimated expenditure of about \$23 million per year for engaging outsourced consultants to assist in conducting professional investigation on water seepage cases. The investigation staff from the FEHD comprises 15 senior health inspectors, 98 health inspectors and 106 investigators, whereas the staff deployed from BD includes two senior professional officers, 10 professional officers, 50 building safety officers, one survey officer and one technical officer. The JO has engaged 13 outsourced consultants in 2012 but has not kept statistics on the number of staff hired by these consultants.
- (c) The relevant statistics on the numbers of water seepage reports received, reports handled, cases with the source of seepage identified and not identified by the JO, numbers of nuisance notices and nuisance orders issued as well as prosecutions instigated in the past three years are tabulated below:

	2010	2011	2012
Number of reports received ^{Note 1}	25 717	23 660	27 353
Number of reports handled	22 971	23 210	24 553
• Cases screened out ^{Note 2}	11 051	12 219	13 727
• Cases with investigations concluded :	11 920	10 991	10 826
- Seepage ceased during investigation	4 861	4 703	4 810
- Source identified	4 737	4 199	4 053
- Source could not be identified	2 322	2 089	1 963
Number of nuisance notices issued	3379	3064	3 639
Number of nuisance orders issued	40	30	17
Number of prosecutions instigated	145	90	70

Note 1 : As there is a lapse of time between receipt of a report and completion of handling a report, the number of reports handled in a year does not necessarily correspond to the number of reports received in that year.

Note 2 : There are cases which do not fall within the scope of follow-up action under the statutory authority of the JO, including unjustified cases and cases withdrawn by informants, and hence investigation will not be conducted for such cases.

It is estimated that the JO will receive about 27 000 reports on water seepage in 2013.

- (d) While the testing methods to identify source of seepage now used by the JO are generally effective, the JO also 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 capability of the JO in handling water seepage reports.

- (e) From experience, JO has been generally effective in helping resolve water seepage problems. The Administration is conducting a review on the long-term role, organisation and staffing of the JO. The provision for the operation of the JO has therefore been extended for two years from 2012-13.

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