

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

**DEVB(PL)275**

Question Serial No.

4223

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

Programme:                      Buildings and Building Works

Controlling Officer:        Director of Buildings

Director of Bureau:        Secretary for Development

Question:

1. Regarding the Joint Office (JO) established by the Department and the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, please list out, year by year, the number of water seepage complaints received, the number of cases handled, the number of cases with the source of seepage identified, the number of applications to the Court for entry warrants to conduct investigation, the number of cases with nuisance notices issued, the number of prosecutions instigated, the number of cases with nuisance orders issued by the Court, the number of convictions and the amount of fines for the past three years (i.e. 2010-11, 2011-12 and 2012-13). Please also provide the time span generally required for handling these cases by the JO.
2. What were the staffing provision and operational expenditure for the JO in each of the past two years (i.e. 2011-12 and 2012-13)? In 2013-14, will more resources (e.g. additional staff) be allocated for expediting the handling of the complaints and improving the success rate of investigation? If so, what are the details? If not, what are the reasons? What will be the estimated expenditure and staffing provision for the JO in the coming year?
3. What pieces of equipment are now provided for the JO to conduct tests to identify the sources of water seepage? Did the JO procure any advanced equipment in 2012-13 to improve the efficiency in handling water seepage complaints and the success rate of investigation, and has the JO any plans in the coming year to procure other equipment to assist the investigation? What are the details involved in these two areas of work?

Asked by: Hon. CHAN Ka-lok, Kenneth

Reply:

1. 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 reports on water seepage and taking of enforcement actions.

The relevant statistics on the numbers of water seepage reports received, reports handled, cases with the source of seepage identified and nuisance notices issued by the JO, numbers of nuisance orders issued by the Court, prosecutions instigated, convictions and the associated penalties in the past three years are tabulated below:

	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>
Number of water seepage reports received <sup>Note 1</sup>	25 717	23 660	27 353
Number of reports handled	22 971	23 210	24 553
Number of cases screened out <sup>Note 2</sup>	11 051	12 219	13 727
Number of cases with source identified	4 737	4 199	4 053
Number of nuisance notices issued	3 379	3 064	3 639
Number of nuisance orders issued	40	30	17
Number of prosecutions instigated	145	90	70
Number of convictions	121	84	52
Range of fine	\$500-\$6,000	\$500-\$3,500	\$500-\$4,500

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.

The JO has not kept statistics on the number of applications to the Court for entry warrants. However, the number of entry warrants granted by the Court in the past three years are tabulated below:

	<b>2010</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2012</b>
Number of entry warrants granted by the Court	136	90	101

The JO also has not kept statistics on the average handling time for individual water seepage cases.

2. The pilot programme of operating the JO has been extended for two years from 2012-13 involving the provision of 64 professional and technical staff from the BD 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 number of staff from the BD for operation of the JO and the expenditure for engaging consultants to assist in conducting professional investigation on water seepage cases in 2011-12, 2012-13 and 2013-14 are tabulated below:

	<b>2011-12</b>	<b>2012-13</b>	<b>2013-14</b>
Number of staff from the BD	60	64	64
Expenditure for engaging consultants (\$ million)	22.5	23.0 (estimate)	23.0 (estimate)

The Administration is conducting a review on the long-term role, organisation and staffing of the JO.

3. The investigation for the sources of water seepage involves the carrying out of a series of moisture level measurements and non-destructive tests such as colour water test at drainage outlets, ponding test for floor slabs and water spray test for walls. These methods are generally recognised to be direct and effective means for investigating the source of water seepage. The equipment and material involved mainly include moisture meters, UV torches and colour dyes. While there is no procurement plan for other apparatus and equipment in 2013-14, the JO 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 reports on water seepage.

Name in block letters: AU Choi-kai

Post Title: Director of Buildings

Date: 9.4.2013