

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

DEVB(PL)338

(Question Serial No. 4376)

Head: (82) Buildings Department
Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not Specified
Programme: (1) Buildings and Building Works
Controlling Officer: Director of Buildings (HUI Siu-wai)
Director of Bureau: Secretary for Development

Question (Member Question No. 12):

Regarding the Joint Office (JO) set up by the Buildings Department and the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) to handle reports about water seepage problems, please advise this Committee:

- a. of the number of staff in different grades and ranks in JO (including staff of the FEHD) and the expenditure involved in 2014-15;
- b. of the number of staff of the contractors hired by JO and the expenditure involved in 2014-15;
- c. of the numbers of cases processed by JO in 2013-14, broken down into cases with the source of seepage identified and not identified, and the number of prosecution cases;
- d. whether the “consultancy study to be commenced on the latest technological methods in identifying the sources of water seepage in buildings” as mentioned in Matters Requiring Special Attention in 2014-15 refers to the same 2013-14 study conducted “with the Applied Science and Technology Research Institute to explore more effective investigation methods so as to enhance the capability of JO in handling water seepage reports” as mentioned in the Controlling Officer’s Reply 2013-14 (Reply no. DEVB(PL)098). If yes, when the study is expected to be completed; if not, please explain the reasons for commencing a new study; and
- e. when measures will be implemented to make permanent the operation of JO to handle public reports about water seepage problems as mentioned in Matters Requiring Special Attention in 2014-15, and what the estimated expenditure for that will be.

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, a risk to the structural safety of a building or wastage of water, the Government will consider intervening 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) since 2006 to co-ordinate investigation of reports on water seepage and taking of enforcement actions. Having regard to the continuous demand for JO's service, the operation of JO will be made permanent in 2014-15. Our reply to the questions is set out below.

- (a) In 2014-15, the operation of JO involves the provision of 64 professional and technical staff from BD and 219 investigation staff from FEHD. The staff deployed from BD include 14 civil service staff and 50 non-civil service contract (NCSC) staff comprising two Senior Professional Officers, ten Professional Officers, 38 Building Safety Officers, seven Survey Officers and seven Technical Officers. The staff from FEHD include 113 civil service staff comprising 15 Senior Health Inspectors and 98 Health Inspectors, and 106 NCSC staff who are all Environmental Nuisance Investigators. The estimated expenditure for staffing provision and departmental expenses for BD is about \$29 million, whereas the estimated direct expenditure incurred by FEHD is about \$73 million.
- (b) Provision of an estimated expenditure of about \$24 million is also allowed in 2014-15 for engaging outsourced consultants to assist in conducting professional investigation on water seepage cases. JO has engaged 13 outsourced consultants in 2013. As the outsourced contracts do not stipulate any requirements on the number of staff to be employed by the consultants, JO does not have relevant information and is unable to provide the number of staff of these consultants.
- (c) The relevant statistics on the numbers of water seepage reports received, reports handled, cases with the source of water seepage identified by JO and cases in which the source of water seepage could not be identified and investigation terminated, and cases of prosecution instigated in 2013 are tabulated below:

	2013
Number of reports received ^{Note 1}	28 504
Number of reports handled	24 856
• Cases screened out ^{Note 2}	13 062
• Cases with investigations concluded	11 794
- Seepage ceased during investigation	4 766
- Source of water seepage identified	4 692
- Source of water seepage could not be identified and investigation terminated	2 336
Number of prosecutions instigated	96

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

- (d) The two studies are different. JO, with the assistance of the Hong Kong Applied Science and Technology Research Institute, is exploring the feasibility of tracing the source of water seepage through real-time monitoring of the water consumption in the suspected premises and variation in the moisture content of the seepage spot. This study involves the application of a new technology, i.e. real-time monitoring of water consumption and variation in moisture content of seepage, in the field of water seepage investigation. After completion of a trial in laboratory environment, JO would further study the field performance of the technology. It is premature to assess the completion date of the study at this stage. On the other hand, the proposed consultancy study on the latest technological methods for identifying the sources of water seepage in buildings aims to keep abreast with the latest technological development in the field of water seepage investigation that is already available in the market. This study is expected to commence in the third quarter of 2014-15 and will take about 18 months to complete.
- (e) The operation of JO will be made permanent in 2014-15. The estimated expenditure for staffing provision and departmental expenses for BD is about \$29 million. Of the current NCSC positions from BD in JO, 17 will be converted to civil service posts in 2014-15. BD will continue to keep in view the manpower requirement for JO.