

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

DEVB(PL)074

(Question Serial No. 1097)

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:

Although the Validation Scheme for Unauthorised Signboards has been implemented since September 2013, it is only a voluntary scheme. In this connection, please inform this Committee:

1. whether the actual number of unauthorised signboards validated since the implementation of the scheme falls short of the expected outcome considerably; and whether the authorities will step up publicity; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that;
2. regarding the cases reported by members of the public, of the percentages of those with the unauthorised, dangerous or abandoned signboards successfully dealt with each year; and as some members of the public have relayed to me that the unauthorised signboards removal orders issued by the Department did not specify the time limit for removal, how the Department can ensure that the removal orders are complied with within a reasonable time;
3. as the Department stated that it would continue the large scale operation on removal of large unauthorised signboards and signboards that are not validated on target buildings or target streets in 2015, whether the Department will exercise discretion to speed up action on cases posing extra risk, e.g. unauthorised signboards in busy commercial areas, as they are likely causes of accidents with casualties; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that.

Asked by: Hon LO Wai-kwok (Member Question No. 35)

Reply:

The Buildings Department (BD) has been making efforts to improve the regulation of signboards. Among other initiatives, the full implementation of the Minor Works Control System (MWCS) since 31 December 2010 enables signboard owners to erect, alter or remove certain types of signboards which are relatively small in scale and pose less potential risk through simplified requirements. Signboard owners may also seek to validate

an unauthorised signboard through the Validation Scheme for Unauthorised Signboards (Validation Scheme) implemented since September 2013.

Our reply to the three-part question is as follows –

1. Up to end-December 2014, 30 unauthorised signboards had been validated under the Validation Scheme. While the number may appear on the low side, we believe that after introduction of the Validation Scheme, many signboard owners may have chosen to remove and re-erect a signboard under MWCS instead of applying for validation under the Validation Scheme. In this connection, minor works associated with signboards have significantly increased from 2 992 cases in 32 months before the implementation of the Validation Scheme (from 31 December 2010 to 1 September 2013) to 6 089 cases in 16 months after the implementation of the Scheme (2 September 2013 to 31 December 2014).

BD has been disseminating relevant information of the Validation Scheme to the public and the industry through different means, including –

- (a) distributing a booklet “Validation Scheme for Unauthorised Signboards”;
- (b) making available relevant guidelines on BD’s website;
- (c) broadcasting Announcement in the Public Interests;
- (d) conducting briefings for the industry and public;
- (e) launching a mobile application for the Minor Works Control System and the Validation Scheme; and
- (f) introducing the Validation Scheme to food business operators during their licensing applications.

In 2015-16, BD will continue to enhance efforts in public education and publicity on building safety, covering the MWCS and the Validation Scheme. Among these is a large-scale publicity event, namely the Building Safety Week 2015, which was held in mid-March 2015 to raise public awareness of building safety including issues related to unauthorised signboards and the implementation of the Validation Scheme.

2. In 2014, 791 unauthorised signboards were removed/validated, and 1 301 dangerous/abandoned signboards were removed/repared. BD does not keep statistics on the percentage of signboards removed from cases reported by members of the public.

For removal orders issued against unauthorised signboards, there will be a specified time limit for compliance, which is normally 60 days. BD will issue warning letters to non-compliant signboard owners after the time limit. Prosecution may be instigated against failure to comply with orders without any reasonable excuse after the issue of warning letters.

3. In 2015-16, BD will continue to take enforcement action against unauthorised signboards. The potential risk posed by unauthorised signboards is one of the criteria which BD will take into account in selecting target areas for its large scale operations. If any signboard becomes dangerous, BD will take prompt action to arrange for the repair/removal of the signboard and, if appropriate, recover the cost of such works, plus supervision charge and surcharge from the signboard owners afterwards.

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