

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

DEVB(PL)078

(Question Serial No. 0895)

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:

The Department stated in this Programme that, with the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, it had made permanent the operation for handling public reports about water seepage problems; in this connection, will the authorities inform this Committee:

- (1) of the improvement made in the past three years in response to the criticism and improvement recommendations made earlier by The Ombudsman, including whether there were any increases in the joint staff establishment, strengthening measures for handling reports and investigating the sources of water seepage, etc.; if so, of the details;
- (2) of the number of reports and complaints about water seepage received, the numbers of investigation visits and nuisance notices issued, prosecution instigated and the percentage of cases satisfactorily concluded in the past three years; and
- (3) of the estimated expenditure and details of the scope of study in relation to the consultancy study which, as stated by the authorities, was being conducted on the latest methods in identifying the sources of water seepage in buildings?

Asked by: Hon MAK Mei-kuen, Alice (Member Question No. 40)

Reply:

- (1) In response to the recommendations made by the Ombudsman in 2008, the Joint Office (JO) set up by the Buildings Department (BD) and the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department has implemented various measures to enhance the effectiveness of handling reports on water seepage, including drawing up and reviewing internal guidelines on investigation work, formulating milestones for progress monitoring at various stages of investigation, and enhancing information management. Since January 2014, with a view to enhancing its service quality, the JO has set two performance pledges as follows –
 - (a) to contact the informant within six working days upon receipt of a water seepage report to arrange for investigation at the premises concerned; and
 - (b) to issue a nuisance notice within seven working days upon verification of the investigation results on the source of the seepage nuisance.

In each of the past three years, there were 64 professional and technical staff from BD in the JO. With the operation of the JO made permanent in April 2014, some of the non-civil service contract positions in the JO have been converted into civil service posts.

Regarding investigation of the source of water seepage in buildings, the JO keeps abreast of the latest technologies with a view to exploring more effective investigation methods. In recent years, the JO has employed new equipment such as infrared camera and microwave tomography scanning device on a trial basis to facilitate identification of the source of water in complicated cases. A consultant has also been engaged to study the latest technological methods.

- (2) The statistics on water seepage reports received, reports handled, results of investigation, nuisance notices issued, prosecutions instigated and convictions in the past three years are tabulated below –

Number of Cases	2012	2013	2014
Reports received	27 353	28 504	27 896
Reports handled ⁽¹⁾	24 553	24 856	22 056
• Cases screened out ⁽²⁾	13 727	13 062	10 961
• Cases with investigations concluded	10 826	11 794	11 095
- Seepage ceased during investigation	4 810	4 766	4 146
- Source of water seepage identified	4 053	4 692	4 816
- Source of water seepage could not be identified and investigation terminated	1 963	2 336	2 133
Nuisance Notices issued ⁽¹⁾	3 639	4338	4 700
Prosecutions instigated ⁽¹⁾	70	96	88
Convictions ⁽¹⁾	52	50	60

Note ⁽¹⁾ : The figures do not necessarily correspond to the number of reports received in the same year.

Note ⁽²⁾ : There are cases such as unjustified cases and withdrawal cases, in which no investigation will be made by the JO.

The JO does not keep statistics on the number of investigation visits for water seepage cases. The number of visits required for investigating each individual case varies due to a number of factors, including the nature and complexity of the case and whether the relevant owners and occupants are cooperative.

- (3) The consultancy study on the latest technological methods in identifying the source of water seepage in buildings commenced in October 2014 and is expected to be completed in 18 months. The total expenditure of the study is estimated to be \$4.5 million. The study will research on technological matters relating to water seepage investigation in buildings both locally and overseas, together with the carrying out of field tests on selected cases. It will also assess and recommend the most suitable

testing methods for use in private buildings as well as formulating technical guidelines for use by the JO.

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