

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

DEVB(PL)242

(Question Serial No. 3722)

Head: (82) Buildings Department

Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not Specified

Programme: (1) Buildings and Building Works

Controlling Officer: Director of Buildings (YU Tak-cheung)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Development

Question:

1. Please provide the staff establishment and expenditure of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department and the Buildings Department in connection with the operation of the Joint Office for Investigation of Water Seepage Complaints (JO) in 2019-20.
2. Please provide a breakdown of the numbers of water seepage cases received and handled by JO (including the number of cases in which the sources of seepage were identified by conventional tests), the number of cases in which professional investigation was carried out by JO staff and the number of cases handled by consultants commissioned by JO in 2019.
3. Please provide the number of water seepage cases in which JO staff have visited the flats concerned and conducted investigation using new testing technologies such as infrared thermography and microwave tomography in the three pilot districts (i.e. Kowloon City, Wan Chai and Central and Western); the investigation time (including the shortest, average and longest time); the number of cases successfully resolved; the number of successful prosecutions against occupants who were the sources of seepage; and the relevant costs (including the lowest, average and highest costs with the areas of the flats where tests were conducted) since the second half of June 2018.
4. Are there any plans to enhance the effectiveness of carrying out water seepage tests? If yes, what is the cost involved?

Asked by: Hon MA Fung-kwok (LegCo internal reference no.: 16)

Reply:

1. The staff establishment and expenditure of the Joint Office (JO) set up by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) and the Buildings Department (BD) in handling water seepage reports in buildings in 2019-20 are tabulated below –

FEHD	2019-20
Number of investigation and co-ordinating staff	236
Staff cost and departmental expenses (\$ million)	134.8 (estimated)

BD	2019-20
Number of professional and technical staff	82
Staff cost and departmental expenses (\$ million)	53.7 (estimated)
Expenditure for engaging outsourced consultants (\$ million)	26.0 (estimated)

2. Generally speaking, JO staff are responsible for carrying out initial investigation of the source of seepage, such as colour water test for drainage pipes. In cases where the source of seepage cannot be identified by the initial investigation, JO staff will carry out a professional investigation with the assistance of outsourced consultants. Statistics on handling of water seepage reports by JO in 2019 are tabulated below –

Number of Cases	2019
Reports received	34 169
Reports handled ⁽¹⁾	28 096
(a) Cases screened out ⁽²⁾	13 867
(b) Cases with investigation concluded ⁽³⁾	14 229
- Cases with source of water seepage identified	5 663
- Cases with source of water seepage not identified and investigation terminated	2 891
- Cases with seepage ceased during investigation	5 675
(c) Among the cases in (b) above, cases required professional investigation ⁽⁴⁾	10 078

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

Note ⁽²⁾: These include unjustified cases not meeting the 35% moisture content criterion and withdrawn cases, etc. where no investigation was conducted by JO.

Note ⁽³⁾: These include cases adopting conventional testing methods and/or new testing methods.

Note ⁽⁴⁾: Cases requiring professional investigation were carried out with the assistance of outsourced consultants.

3. Statistics on professional investigation of water seepage reports by adopting new testing methods such as infrared thermography (IT) and microwave tomography (MT) in the three pilot districts (i.e. Central and Western, Wanchai, and Kowloon City) since June 2018 till end of 2019 are tabulated below –

	Central and Western	Wanchai	Kowloon City
(a) Cases adopting new testing methods in professional investigation	255	249	394
(b) Among the cases in (a), number of cases concluded	131	152	279
(c) Among the cases in (b) above, number of cases with source of water seepage identified	119	141	180
(d) Among the cases in (c) above, number of nuisance notices (NN) issued ⁽¹⁾	93	134	185
(e) Among the cases in (d) above, number of convictions in respect of prosecutions against non-compliance with NN	0	3	2

Note ⁽¹⁾: Some cases in (c) did not trigger the issue of NN, e.g. seepage caused by rainwater. In some cases, more than one NN issued for cases that involved co-owners or co-tenants.

The time spent on investigating a water seepage case depends on a number of factors, including the nature and complexity of the case and whether the relevant owners or occupants are co-operative as JO staff and outsourced consultants have to enter the premises concerned for carrying out non-destructive tests to identify the source of seepage. Generally speaking, JO could normally complete the investigation and inform the informant of the result within 90 working days with the co-operation of the concerned owners/occupants. If the investigation could not be completed within 90 working days, JO will notify the informant of the progress of the investigation.

Taking an ordinary domestic flat with one kitchen and one toilet as an example, the cost for engaging an outsourced consultant to adopt IT and MT in carrying out professional investigation of a water seepage report is estimated to be around \$8,000 under the current contracts. The estimate does not include the overall staffing and operating expenditure of the JO.

4. With experience gained and data obtained through pilot application of the new testing technologies, JO has since September 2019 extended the new testing technologies to another five pilot districts (i.e. Sham Shui Po, Kwai Tsing, Tuen Mun, Tai Po and North District). JO is now refining the technical guidelines and procedures relating to the use of the new testing technologies and making use of the additional expenditure of \$26.3 million for employing contract staff and engaging outsourced consultants for gradual extension of new technologies to other districts with a view to enhancing the efficiency and effectiveness of JO for investigation of water seepages.