

Department: FIRE SERVICES DEPARTMENT

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FSD statement on emergency incidents information

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In response to the Hong Kong Journalists Association's opinions on the Fire Services Department (FSD)'s information dissemination mechanism for emergency incidents, an FSD spokesman made the following response today (February 20):

"To cope with communication demand of frontline personnel and enhance operational efficiency, FSD adopted a new Digital Trunked Radio System. The new system can enhance the radio coverage and the mobilising ability at scenes of incident, which is very important for improving operational efficiency. The department has no intention to restrict media reporting.

In disseminating information provided by callers requesting emergency assistance, FSD will treat the public interest involving public safety as the major premises and strictly follow the requirements under the Personal Data (Privacy) Ordinance and ensure that all the important principles governing disclosure of third party information under the Code of Access to Information have been complied with.

The department understands that in case of certain emergency incidents, public interest may override individual privacy. In assessing whether a case involves public interest, the department will consider various factors under the advice of the Department of Justice, which includes:

- (i) whether the incidents involve public safety risk;
- (ii) whether the incidents involve public health risk;
- (iii) whether the incidents involve environmental risk; or
- (iv) whether the release of information helps prevent the public from serious harm.

According to the information dissemination mechanism for emergency incidents, almost all cases of fires and emergency rescue services (99.4 per cent) were released to the media. Only a minor number of these cases involving criminal elements were released by the Police. Between January 3 and February 17, information on 8,065 cases, an average of 175 cases daily, had been disseminated to the media. Of them, 58 per cent were fires (4,700 cases). About 40 per cent of cases (3,148 cases) were cases of other emergency rescue services. They involved cases of attempted jumps from height, traffic accidents, gas leakages, mountain rescues, persons being trapped inside lifts and houses.

Regarding emergency incidents, the top priority of FSD is to mobilise emergency appliances to the incident scenes. FSD has to ensure that dissemination of information would not affect the efficiency of its Fire Services Communication Centre in dispatching emergency appliances. FSD, therefore, is unable to release real time incident information to the media. Nonetheless, the department will release the available incident information via the Government News and Media Information System as soon as possible to facilitate media coverage."

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