

Interdepartmental report on the progress of enforcement actions on mini-storage facilities

The Government conducted an interdepartmental briefing today (June 15) at which representatives from the Fire Services Department (FSD), the Buildings Department (BD), the Lands Department (LandsD) and the Labour Department (LD) reported the progress of enforcement actions on mini-storage facilities.

The FSD, BD, LandsD and the LD have conducted a territory-wide inspection of mini-storage facilities since June 28 last year. The operation is aimed to improve the safety level of the mini-storage facilities, so as to comply with the current legislation.

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer (Fire Safety) of the FSD, Mr Chui Man-leung, said, "The FSD have completed the inspections of all mini-storage facilities. As at June 11 this year, the FSD has issued 4 917 Fire Hazard Abatement Notices (FHANs) to 764 persons in charge of those mini-storage facilities with irregularities identified. Among those issued, 239 FHANs have been complied with. Among those, three operators of the mini-storages have complied with the requirements set out in the FHANs issued by the FSD, which means they have completed all relevant fire safety improvement works."

Various irregularities in contravention of the Fire Services Ordinance were found in the above mini-storage facilities. The irregularities identified included:

- i. undesirable types of locking devices for escape doors;
- ii. insufficient exit signs and directional signs;
- iii. insufficient coverage of the hose reel system;
- iv. obstruction to/insufficient number of windows; and
- v. undesirable arrangement of storage cubicles.

The FSD will actively consider the alternative proposals submitted by the operators of mini-storages if the safety level meet with the FSD's requirements and those proposals could abate such fire hazards. The department has clarified with the trade the principles of considering the alternative proposals. For example, the FSD requires a 2.4 meter separation between mini-storage zones that could prevent the fire from spreading to another zone in 30 minutes. FSD prepared to accept any alternative proposal which could achieve the above fire separation requirement. We will study each case carefully to ensure that all fire hazards in the mini-storages will be eliminated, Mr Chui said.

The FSD adopts a pragmatic approach to enforce the relevant ordinances. The department noticed that most of the operators of the mini-storages have started taking follow-up actions to abate the fire hazards. The operators will be given more time to comply with the FHANs if they are taking active measures which involve major renovation works to abate the fire hazards. The department will institute prosecution against operators who fail to adopt any improvement measures by the deadline as stipulated in the FHANs, he added.

The Chief Building Surveyor (Fire Safety) of the BD, Mr Michael Pang, said that the BD had inspected all 885 mini-storage premises under the territory-wide inspection. As at June 11, the BD had issued 1 627 orders in respect of 766 mini-storage premises, amongst which 69 orders had been complied with. For the remaining outstanding cases, the owners or operators are in general arranging the rectification works and have submitted applications for extension of time.

Irregularities in contravention of the Buildings Ordinance were generally found in the mini-storage premises, and these mainly included:

- i. inadequate width of the means of escape along the aisles between the storage cubicles;
- ii. the swing-out of cubicle doors causing the effective width along the aisles being less than that required under the regulation; and
- iii. the layout of the storage cubicles causing excessive travel distance in the escape route.

Regarding the alternative designs for the swing-out doors of the storage cubicles in mini-storage premises proposed by the trade, Mr Pang said that having regard to the mode of operation of mini-storages and the fire risk, the BD had accepted certain arrangements for design of such swing-out doors. The details have been conveyed to the trade and uploaded to the BD's website.

The Principal Land Executive (Land Control and Lease Enforcement) of LandsD, Mr Patrick Leung, said, "As at June 11, the land leases of the lots where a total of 885 mini-storage premises are situated have been checked. The leases of most of these mini-storage premises permit godown use, while 219 premises were suspected to have breached the uses specified in the lease. Regarding these cases of suspected breach of land lease, LandsD has conducted site inspection and confirmed that those 219 mini-storage premises have breached the uses specified in the lease, and warning letters

have been issued to owners involved requiring them to rectify the breach of uses within 28 days.

"Among the 219 premises, 33 have rectified the breach of uses; and LandsD has registered the warning letters for 182 premises at the Land Registry as the owners failed to rectify the breach of uses during the specified period," Mr Leung added.

The Chief Occupational Safety Officer (Operations) of the Labour Department (LD), Mr Thomas Chan, said, "The LD completed the inspection of 885 mini-storages and issued 228 written warnings and 13 improvement notices to 228 of them in respect of occupational safety of employees, mainly concerning inadequate fire safety measures and insufficient first aid facilities. The LD initiated 13 prosecutions among these cases. All of them have been convicted by courts and fined \$125,000 in total."

The departments concerned will continue to follow up on the cases in accordance with relevant ordinances and will request the building owners and persons in charge of the relevant mini-storage facilities to abate these safety hazards as soon as possible.

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