



Fire Services

The Fire Services Department is an emergency service responsible for fire-fighting and rescue on land and sea. It also provides an emergency ambulance service for the sick and the injured, and gives fire protection advice to the public.

Organisation: The Department has 8 998 uniformed and 642 civilian members. It is organised into seven commands — three Operational Commands, a Licensing and Certification Command, a Fire Safety Command, an Ambulance Command and a Headquarters Command; and an Administration Division. Commanding the Department is the Director of Fire Services.

Fire and Special Services: Fire-fighting, rescue and other emergency services are undertaken by the three Operational Commands — Hong Kong (including marine and off-shore islands), Kowloon and the New Territories. In 2010, they responded to 40 604 fire calls and 26 859 special service calls.

In 2010, accidents involving the preparation of foodstuff contributed to the major cause of fires, followed by careless handling or disposal of cigarette ends, matches and candles and electrical faults. Fires claimed 11 lives and 276 injuries.

Special service calls cover a wide range of incidents, including traffic and industrial accidents, gas leakages, landslides, flooding, house collapses, attempts by people to jump from height and malfunctioning lifts.

The Department has 569 operational appliances and vehicles fitted with up-to-date fire-fighting and rescue equipment. The first-line appliances, basically comprising major pumps, hydraulic platforms, light rescue units and turntable ladders/snorkels, are supported where necessary by other special appliances/equipment. A fleet of 21 fireboats and support vessels provides fire protection and rescue services within Hong Kong waters.

Ambulance Services: The Ambulance Command operates 266 ambulances, four mobile casualty treatment centres, 35 paramedic motorcycles and three rapid response vehicles. All ambulances and motorcycles are equipped with paramedic facilities.

In 2010, the Command responded to 687 133 calls, conveying a total of 619 101 patients or casualties to hospitals/clinics, or an average of 1 882 calls a day.

To enhance the emergency ambulance services in the long run, the Administration has planned to implement a Medical Priority Dispatch System (MPDS) in Hong Kong. A public consultation was conducted in 2009. According to results of the consultation, about 70% of the public supported the MPDS. In April 2010, the Legislative Council Panel on Security was briefed on the results. The views and comments of the Panel and the public will be taken into careful consideration when the Administration explores the way forward and relevant details of the long term plan.

Frontline firemen are also trained as first responders to provide basic life support to casualties and patients before the arrival of an ambulance crew. First responders are now available in all fire stations throughout the territory. In 2010, first responders turned out to 49 451 cases.

Communications: The Fire Services Communications Centre (FSCC) is equipped with a computerised mobilising system for the efficient and effective mobilising of fire-fighting and ambulance resources for fires and emergencies. It is linked to all fire stations, ambulance depots and fireboat stations for despatch of resources.

The FSCC, manned round the clock, also caters for receipt of complaints and enquiries of fire hazards and dangerous goods. During major incidents, it acts as a co-ordinator for Government departments and public utilities. The FSCC has five Mobile Command Units which serve as on-scene command and control centres in major incidents.

The FSCC has adopted a sophisticated telecommunication and computer integrated mobilising system — the Third Generation Mobilising System — to improve the efficiency of fire-fighting and rescue operations by enhancing the identification, location and mobilisation of resources.

The Department will fully replace the existing analogue trunked radio communication system with the digital one to enhance the voice quality and communication capabilities. The new radio communication system is expected to be commissioned in mid 2011.

Licensing and Certification: The Licensing and Certification Command enforces fire safety regulations and policies, and processes the registration of fire service installation contractors.

The Policy Division formulates procedural instructions and guidelines on fire protection matters, researches and approves fire service installations, portable fire-fighting equipment and gas cylinders. It also handles legal and prosecution matters.

The Dangerous Goods Division is responsible for the licensing of dangerous goods stores and vehicles, and timber stores.

The Fire Service Installations Task Force inspects fire service installations in buildings; handles complaints regarding building fire service installations and monitors the performance of registered fire service installations contractors.

The Fire Service Installations Division and Ventilation Division are responsible for inspecting fire service installations and ventilating systems in buildings respectively.

The two regional offices — the Hong Kong and Kowloon West and the New Territories and Kowloon East — are responsible for advising other Government

authorities on the fire safety measures for the purposes of licensing/registering various types of premises.

Officers of the Command are seconded to the Home Affairs Department to inspect hotels, guesthouses, private clubs and bedspace apartments, and formulate fire safety requirements on these premises; whereas some are seconded to the Social Welfare Department to advise on fire protection measures in residential care homes for the elderly.

Fire Safety: The Fire Safety Command draws up fire safety policies and formulates fire safety measures in buildings. It also devotes much of its efforts to the upgrading of fire safety in old buildings and enhancing the community's awareness on fire safety.

The two Building Improvement Divisions are responsible for upgrading fire safety measures for various types of buildings in Hong Kong and investigating building fire safety complaints. A Special Enforcement Unit is set up to conduct inspections of old buildings and take enforcement actions against irregularities detected. A Building Fire Safety Envoy Scheme has been launched to encourage the public's participation in safeguarding buildings where they live or work. A Building Safety Loan Scheme, administered by the Director of Buildings, provides financial assistance to individual owners of all types of buildings to carry out fire safety improvement works.

The New Projects Division, in co-operation with the Building Authority and other government departments, is responsible for vetting new building plans including projects on mass transit systems, tunnels, bridges and airport, as well as formulating fire protection requirements appropriate to relevant premises and risks.

The Railway Development Strategy Division formulates and scrutinises fire safety requirements for new railway infrastructure projects. The Division has also been actively participating in the planning and design process of other new railway schemes by offering fire protection advices to the MTR and consultants.

The Support Division is responsible for formulating, reviewing and updating departmental policies on building fire safety improvement. The Division also devotes much of its efforts to improving public knowledge of fire safety. It produces publicity materials for TV and radio broadcasts as well as leaflets, posters, pamphlets and exhibits on fire safety. The Division works closely with local fire stations in organising fire safety talks, seminars, fire safety exhibitions, fire drills and training of Fire Safety Ambassadors (FSA), who are volunteers from various sectors of the community. To add impetus to the FSA Scheme, local community leaders are appointed as Honorary Presidents in 18 districts.

Administration and Logistic Support: The Headquarters Command offers policy, planning, management and logistic support to the operational Commands. It also oversees the operation of Fire Services Communications Centre, Fire Services Training School, recruitment and examination, workshops and transport, occupational safety and health, logistics, physical training, information and publicity matters, staff welfare and statistics.

The Administration Division, staffed by civilians, deals with departmental establishment, personnel, finance, appointments, general matters, staff relations, audit and translation service.

Airport Fire Contingent: The primary role of the contingent is to provide rescue and fire fighting coverage for the Hong Kong International Airport. The contingent,

which comprises two fire stations and two sea rescue berths at strategic locations on the airport platform, is equipped with 14 fire appliances, two command boats and eight speedboats.

Diving Services: The Diving Unit comprises about 150 active divers responsible for all aquatic search and rescue within Hong Kong waters down to the maximum depth of 42 metres using compressed air diving equipment and underwater breaking-in tools. The Unit also operates a three-compartment compression chamber on Stonecutters Island for treating patients suffering from decompression illness and requiring hyperbaric oxygen treatment.

The FSD Diving Base on Stonecutters Island is equipped with a range of advanced professional and training facilities to enhance the search and rescue skills of Service divers.

Training: Fire Services Training School (FSTS) provides basic and specialised fire-fighting and rescue training for recruits. It also provides refresher and advanced training courses for all fire personnel.

Fire Services Ambulance Command Training School (FSACTS) provides initial and paramedic training to recruits and ambulance personnel. It also provides Advanced Ambulance Aid Training at first responder level to serving fire personnel.

The fire and ambulance recruits who have successfully completed a 26-week initial training will be posted to fire stations and ambulance depots respectively to continue their on-the-job training in order to gain field experience.

Apart from providing training for staff of other government departments, private organisations and overseas fire officers, FSTS also runs an Enhanced Smart Teen Challenge Project for youngsters jointly with the Education Bureau.

FSACTS provides initial and refresher training on cardio-pulmonary resuscitation to members of the public. The school also trains staff of property management companies, hotels, government premises, elderly homes, airport and MTR on the use of public access defibrillators to become Heart Savers.

In addition to overseas training on latest fire services technology and management skills, officers and instructors also attend various advanced courses conducted by overseas fire experts in Hong Kong.

Workshops: The Workshops Division is responsible for all engineering matters relating to fire appliances, fire-fighting and rescue equipment. These include design, development, procurement, inspection and maintenance, fitting out, modification, testing and commissioning.

Response Times: There are altogether 80 fire stations, 37 ambulance depots and six fireboat fire stations. They are strategically located to provide an emergency response for all areas. The graded response times for building fire calls are six minutes for built-up areas and nine to 23 minutes for areas of dispersed risks and isolated developments. For emergency ambulance services, the target response time is 12 minutes. The performance target is to achieve these response times in 92.5% of all calls.

Public Liaison Group: The group which comprises 30 members of the public from all walks of life helps promote better understanding between the public and the Department. It makes suggestions for improving the delivery of the Department's public services.