

Hong Kong: The Facts

Fire Services



The Fire Services Department (FSD) provides emergency and rescue services for the public and is responsible for firefighting and rescue on land and at sea. It also provides emergency ambulance services for the sick and the injured, and gives advice on fire protection measures and fire hazards to the public.

Organisation: In 2023, the FSD has 10,729 uniformed and 758 civilian members. It comprises four Operational Commands, a Licensing and Certification Command, a Fire Safety Command, an Ambulance Command, a Corporate Strategy Command, an Operational Support and Professional Development Command and an Administration Branch. The head of the department is the Director of Fire Services.

Response Time: There are 83 fire stations, 41 ambulance depots, seven fireboat stations, two sea rescue berths and two diving bases strategically located to provide emergency responses for all areas within designated response times. The graded response time for building fire calls is six minutes for built-up areas and nine to 23 minutes for areas of dispersed risks and isolated developments. For emergency ambulance calls, the target response time is 12 minutes. The FSD pledges to achieve the targets of 92.5% for building fire calls in built-up areas, 94.5% for building fire calls in areas of dispersed risks and isolated developments, and 92.5% for all emergency ambulance calls.

Fire and Special Services: Firefighting, rescue and other emergency services are undertaken by the four Operational Commands, namely Hong Kong Island (including marine and off-shore islands), Kowloon, New Territories North and New Territories South Commands. In 2023, they responded to 36,103 fire calls and 40,763 special service calls.

In 2023, fires claimed 31 lives and injured 361 persons. Accidents occurred during cooking, careless handling of lighted materials (such as cigarette ends, matches and candles) and electrical faults were the major causes of fires.

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

The FSD has 713 operational fire appliances and other supporting vehicles fitted with different types of tools and equipment to fulfil operational needs. The frontline appliances, basically comprising hydraulic platforms, major pumps, light rescue units and turntable ladders, are supported where necessary by other special appliances/equipment. A fleet of 28 vessels provides firefighting and rescue services within Hong Kong waters.

Ambulance Service: The Ambulance Command operates 536 ambulance vehicles, which are comprised of town ambulances, Paramedic Equipment Tenders, Emergency Medical Assistant Motorcycles, Mobile Casualty Treatment Centres, Rapid Response Vehicles, Rapid Response Motorcycles and mini ambulances. All ambulance vehicles are equipped with paramedic facilities.

In 2023, the Command responded to 816,329 calls, representing an average of 2,237 calls a day, and conveyed a total of 729,697 casualties or patients to hospitals or clinics.

To enhance the emergency ambulance services (EAS), the FSD offers post-dispatch advice (PDA) by phone after dispatching ambulances to scenes. All personnel from the Fire

Services Communications Centre (FSCC) are trained emergency medical dispatchers. With the aid of a computer system, they are able to offer immediate, comprehensive and appropriate first aid advice on more than 30 types of injury and sickness, covering, among others, traumatic injuries, choking, unconscious/fainting and cardiac or respiratory arrest.

Frontline fire personnel are also trained as first responders to provide basic life support for casualties and patients before the arrival of ambulance crews. First responders are available in all fire stations throughout the territory. In 2023, the first responders turned out for 43,012 cases.

Communications: The FSCC is equipped with a computerised mobilising system for the efficient and effective mobilising of firefighting and ambulance resources for fires and emergencies. The system is linked to all fire stations, ambulance depots and fireboat stations for dispatch of resources.

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

The use of Digital Trunked Radio System ensures effective and efficient radio communication at incident scenes.

The FSCC, which operates round-the-clock, is also responsible for handling complaints and enquiries about fire hazards and dangerous goods. During major incidents, it acts as an emergency coordinator for government departments and public utilities. The FSD has six Mobile Command Units and a Light Mobile Command Unit which serve as on-scene command and control centres in major incidents.

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

The Licensing and Policy Division, comprising the Licensing Group and Policy Group, is responsible for formulating procedural instructions and guidelines on fire protection, conducting researches on relevant issues, as well as offering advice to relevant government authorities on fire safety measures for the purposes of licensing/registering various types of premises. It also investigates complaints about fire safety in licensed/registered premises.

The Dangerous Goods Legislation Division is responsible for coordinating the legislative amendment exercise of the Dangerous Goods Ordinance (DGO) and its subsidiary legislation. It formulates and reviews the fire protection policies in relation to dangerous goods and timber stores. It promulgates and updates various Codes of Practice and relevant guidelines related to the DGO, as well as formulates and implements policies and measures for the control of Classes 2 to 9 dangerous goods on land in Hong Kong. It also handles legal and prosecution matters related to fire safety and protection.

The Dangerous Goods Control Division is responsible for controlling the manufacture, storage and use of Classes 2 to 9 dangerous goods on land in Hong Kong. It also approves the use of tanks for containing Class 3A dangerous goods.

The Dangerous Goods Enforcement Division is responsible for the licensing of dangerous goods vehicles and timber stores. It regulates Class 9A dangerous goods and

processes applications for pressure receptacle approval and approved persons. It takes enforcement actions against illicit fuelling activities and dangerous goods related offences. It also manages the seized and confiscated dangerous goods.

The Fire Protection Facilities Supervision Division inspects FSIs in buildings, handles complaints regarding building FSIs, monitors the performance of registered FSI contractors and approves portable firefighting equipment.

The Fire Protection Engineering Compliance Division, comprising the Fire Protection Facilities Group and the Ventilating Systems Group, is responsible for carrying out acceptance tests for FSIs and inspecting ventilating systems in buildings. The Ventilating Systems Group also approves fusible links and electrostatic filters/precipitators used in ventilating systems and assists the Buildings Department (BD) in processing the registration of Specialist Contractors (Ventilation Works Category).

The Licensing Authority Division comprises officers seconded to the Office of the Licensing Authority (OLA) of the Home Affairs Department to assist in the licensing of hotels, guesthouses, clubs, karaoke establishments and bedspace apartments, as well as dealing with enforcement and prosecution matters under the jurisdiction of the OLA.

Some officers of the Command are seconded to the Social Welfare Department to advise on fire protection measures in residential care homes for the elderly and residential care homes for persons with disabilities.

Fire Safety: The Fire Safety Command draws up fire safety policies and formulates fire safety measures for buildings, and is committed to upgrading the fire safety standard of old buildings. It also vets loan applications for fire safety improvement works and raises public awareness of fire safety.

The Building Improvement Strategy and Special Operations Division reviews the strategy for improving fire safety in old buildings, formulates a blueprint for the long-term building improvement planning, coordinates with the bureaux/departments concerned, and arranges special operations to achieve building improvement objectives.

The three Building Improvement Divisions are responsible for upgrading fire safety measures for various types of buildings in Hong Kong and investigating complaints about fire safety in buildings. They also conduct proactive fire safety inspections on various types of buildings and premises.

The New Projects Division, in collaboration with the BD and other government departments, vets new and amended general building plans, processes FSI drawings and scrutinises fire engineering reports of projects, including tunnels, bridges and mega structures. It also formulates fire protection requirements that meet the needs of such premises and cope with relevant risks.

The Airport Expansion Project Division processes statutory submissions relating to the Three-runway System project of the Hong Kong International Airport (HKIA) which include vetting of general building plans and FSI drawings, scrutinising fire engineering reports and giving advice on fire safety measures. It also conducts FSI acceptance inspections for the project to ensure the FSI complies with the statutory requirements.

The Railway Development Strategy Division formulates and scrutinises fire safety requirements for new and existing railway infrastructure projects. It has been actively participating in the planning, design and improvement works of various railway projects by offering fire protection advice to the MTR Corporation and its consultants.

The Support Division formulates, reviews and updates policies on building fire safety and undertakes the preparatory work for introducing legislation. It also handles general enquiries, provides general fire safety advice to the public, and is responsible for policy matters related to the Fire Safety Ambassador Scheme and the Building Fire Safety Envoy Scheme.

Administration and Logistical Support: The Corporate Strategy Command provides planning and management support to the Director as well as policy and logistical support

to other Commands. It also oversees issues relating to information and communications technology, occupational safety and health, procurement and logistics support, psychological services and staff welfare, as well as disseminates information regarding public safety to the general public and the media, and coordinates community relation campaigns and public education programmes.

The Operational Support and Professional Development Command is responsible for the operational support and strategic quality planning for services rendered by the FSD under a specialised and institutionalised quality assurance mechanism. It also oversees the operation of the Fire and Ambulance Services Academy (FASA) and the FSCC, as well as issues related to recruitment, training, examination, workshops and transport of the FSD.

The Administration Branch, supported by civilian staff, is responsible for matters related to departmental establishment, human resources management, financial management, appointments, general administration, staff relations, internal audit, outsourcing and translation services.

Airport Fire Contingent: The primary role of the Contingent is to provide rescue and firefighting coverage for the HKIA. The Contingent, comprising three fire stations and two sea rescue berths at strategic locations on the airport platform, is equipped with 21 fire appliances, three ambulances, two command boats and eight speedboats.

Diving Services: The FSD has 136 active divers, of which 93 are stationed in the Diving Unit and 43 in the Airport Fire Contingent. The Diving Unit is responsible for all aquatic search and rescue operations within Hong Kong waters down to a maximum depth of 70 metres using compressed air and mixed gas diving equipment, underwater breaking-in tools and underwater remotely operated vehicle.

The FSD Diving Base on Stonecutters Island is equipped with a range of advanced and professional underwater and aquatic training facilities to enhance the search and rescue skills of FSD divers and the aquatic rescue capabilities of all fire personnel. The Base is also equipped with a three-compartment compression chamber for treating patients who suffer from decompression illness and require hyperbaric oxygen treatment.

Training: The FASA provides foundation firefighting and rescue training for recruits as well as refresher and advanced training courses for all fire personnel. It also conducts foundation and paramedic training for recruits and ambulance personnel. Besides, advanced ambulance aid training at the first responder level is offered to serving fire personnel.

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

The FASA has strived to seek accreditation to its key training programmes. The Fireman/Firewoman (Operational/Marine) Foundation Training Course, the Professional Diploma in Ambulance Services for Ambulanceman/Ambulancewoman, the Professional Diploma in Paramedicine, as well as some specialist training programmes offered by the FASA have been accredited as Qualifications Framework Level 4 by the Hong Kong Council for Accreditation of Academic and Vocational Qualifications, which is equivalent to the level of an Associate Degree or a Higher Diploma/Higher Certificate.

Apart from providing training for the FSD staff, the FASA also provides basic firefighting, fire safety and ambulance aid training for personnel of other government departments, private organisations, and advanced courses for the overseas/mainland counterparts. Furthermore, the FASA runs an Enhanced Smart Teen Project for youngsters jointly with the Education Bureau.

In addition, officers attend training outside Hong Kong on the latest fire services technology, paramedic and management skills on a regular basis.

Workshops: The Workshops and Transport Division is responsible for all engineering matters related to fire appliances, ambulance vehicles, as well as firefighting and rescue equipment including firefighting robots. These include design, development, procurement, inspection, maintenance, modification, testing and commissioning. Its Duty Fitter Teams offer 24-hour emergency on-site repair services to the FSD's vehicles and equipment.

Community Collaboration Network: A Community Collaboration Network comprising chairpersons of 18 District Fire Safety Committees is set up to promote a better understanding between the FSD and members of the public in order to improve the department's services and better respond to the needs of the community.

Resuscitation Alliance: The Resuscitation Alliance (RA), comprising the FSD, the Auxiliary Medical Service, the Civil Aid Service, the Hong Kong Red Cross, the Hong Kong St. John Ambulance, the Hospital Authority and the Resuscitation Council of Hong Kong, is established to promote community resuscitation. As at end-2023, around 70,000 citizens with cardiopulmonary resuscitation and automated external defibrillator training had become members of the RA.

Youth Development: The Fire & Ambulance Services Teen Connect (FAST Connect) uniformed group aims to help young people cultivate positive thinking, aspirations to serve the community, law-abiding awareness, discipline and team spirit through various activities. With a view to providing more young people with a quality learning platform, the FAST Connect has been actively expanding its membership base by inviting the children of serving FSD members to sign up and promoting at the district level through the 18 District Fire Safety Committees. As at end-2023, the FAST Connect had recruited nearly 450 members.