

The 10th Fire Services Department Public Liaison Group

Notes of the Third Meeting

The third meeting of the 10th Fire Services Department Public Liaison Group (PLG) was held at the multi-purpose hall on G/F, Fire Services Headquarters Building on 5 March 2004 at 6:00 p.m.

Opening Remarks

The Department welcomed all members to the third meeting of the 10th PLG and introduced the departmental representatives and members who attended for the first time.

2. Confirmation of the Notes of the Last Meeting

The notes of the last meeting were confirmed without amendments.

3. Activities of the PLG

3.1 The Department expressed that the following activities had been arranged for members from last September until the time of the meeting:

Dates	Activities
19.9.2003	Passing-out Parade of the Fire Services Training School
20.9.2003	Wildlife Protection and Hill Fire Prevention Publicity Campaign Launching Ceremony
21.10.2003	Opening Ceremony of the Lau Fau Shan Fire Station
30.11.2003	Ambulance Service Campaign 2003
7.12.2003	2003-04 Fire Prevention Campaign Launching Ceremony
16.12.2003	Caltex Oil and LPG Terminal Exercise
29.12.2003	Kowloon Command Aircraft Crash cum EFU Exercise
18.2.2004	Opening Ceremony of the Sha Tau Kok Fire Station
23.2.2004	Nam Fung - Parker Cable Tunnel Exercise
28.2.2004	Visit to the Airport Main Fire Station and the Breathing Apparatus and Tactical Training Block of the Fire Services Training School

3.2 A PLG member gave high recognition to the Department's activities as well as the staff's earnest reception. He also believed that members' attendance at exercises would not only boost staff morale and achieve the purpose of monitoring the Department's operation, but also facilitate members' understanding about the work of

the Department. Another PLG member suggested that the Department consider organizing activities during holidays. The Department thanked the two members for their suggestions. The Department would pass on their words of recognition to the staff and consider their proposals.

Matters Arising from Previous Meetings

4. Civic Education

4.1 Members were informed that the Department would continue to organize the Smart Teen Challenge Camp jointly with the Education and Manpower Bureau (EMB). As the Camp had received highly favourable feedback from teachers and students, the Department organized a two-day Leadership and Personal Development Camp on a trial basis together with the EMB February this year. The target of the Camp was secondary school teachers. The EMB would evaluate the effectiveness of the Camp before deciding whether to continue to promote the project.

5. New Fire Appliances and Ambulances

5.1 Members were briefed on the new heavy-duty monitor/nozzle and were shown photos of it. They were informed that the equipment allowed a discharge flow of up to 22,800 litres per minute, equivalent to the total discharge of seven light ones. The monitor/nozzle was kept at Tsing Yi South Fire Station for fighting tank farm fire. Moreover, 41 new ambulances were being built for the Department at the moment and 12 additional light ambulances would be purchased later. The Department proposed to delete this item until the introduction of the new vehicles, by time members would be informed of the progress. Members agreed to delete this item from the agenda of the next meeting.

6. World Firefighter Games (WFG)

6.1 The Department indicated that the Institution of Fire Engineers (Hong Kong Branch) (IFE) had already set up a limited company and signed a contract with the World Governing Body of WFG on 17 September last year. A steering committee, headed by the Director, had been formed for the co-ordination of the whole event. The Department had already started preparations for sending a team to participate in the 8th WFG held at Sheffield in Great Britain this August and for publicity about Hong Kong as the host of the next WGF. An evening film show was organized on a

trial basis on 22 February this year and about \$79,000 were raised for the Fire Services Department Welfare Fund.

7. New Training Facilities

7.1 Members were informed that a departmental representative had apologized for not being able to visit the Breathing Apparatus and Tactical Training Block with PLG members due to other commitments.

8. Fire Hazard Abatement Notice (FHAN)

8.1 Members were informed that the Fire Services (Fire Hazard Abatement) Regulation had come into effect on 1 January this year. With heavier penalties and shorter duration required for the prosecution of offenders, the Department would now be able to combat illicit refueling more effectively.

9. Third Generation Mobilizing System (TGMS) and Fire Tunics

9.1 The Department indicated that as the trial for the provision of mobile phones in ambulances was fairly satisfactory, all ambulances had been equipped with mobile phones since 1 February this year.

10. Accident in which a Bus on Tuen Mun Road Plunged down a Slope

10.1 The Department thanked PLG members for making enquires at the last meeting. Members agreed to delete this item from the agenda of the next meeting.

11. Training on Negotiation Skills

11.1 The Department thanked PLG members for making enquires at the last meeting. Members agreed to delete this item from the agenda of the next meeting.

12. The 11th Fire Services Department PLG

12.1 Members were informed that 14 serving members had accepted the Department's invitation to remain in office and a total of 96 applications for membership of the 11th PLG had been received by the Department. The distribution of applications by areas was as follows:

Areas	Number of New Applications	Number of Members Remaining in Office	Number of New Members (chosen by lot)
Hong Kong	28	5	5
Kowloon	32	4	6
New Territories	36	5	5

The Department also announced that the membership for the next PLG would be drawn by lot outside the multi-purpose hall after the meeting.

13. First Responder Programme

13.1 Members were briefed about the progress and effectiveness of the Programme. Up to 3 March this year, First Responders had attended 650 patients. The following table showed their turnout rate:

Diseases/ Injuries	Turnout Rate (in terms of number of cases)
Heart Disease	427
Airway Obstruction	24
Respiratory Distress	292
Massive Bleeding	19

The Department also said that arrangements would continue to be made for fire personnel to receive Advanced Ambulance Aid Training. The plan was to include more fire stations in the Programme gradually, with the aim of reaching 64 by the end of 2004.

Matters for Discussion

14. Despatching Ambulances in Order of Priority

14.1 The Department said that a PLG member made the following enquiry by fax: "According to the newspapers, the Department announced in the year-end press conference that a feasibility study of despatching ambulances in order of priority based on the information provided by callers would be conducted." The member wanted to know the criterion for despatching ambulances in order of priority. The Department explained that the existing standard criterion for despatching ambulances

was the response time of 12 minutes. From experience, patients' needs varied depending on the urgency of emergency ambulance calls. For example, patients in imminent danger of losing their lives made it necessary to despatch ambulances to the scene as soon as possible while others with less serious conditions, such as abrasions to limbs, might not be greatly affected even if the ambulance could not arrive within 12 minutes. Despatching ambulances in order of priority meant determining the priority of despatching ambulances according to patients' needs. In addition to more effective use of resources, this approach could satisfy patients' different demands for ambulance service. The Department would refer to other countries' experience before establishing any criterion applicable to Hong Kong.

14.2 A PLG member pointed out that Hongkong Electric Company Limited had an existing system especially for storing information on the special needs of customers, which could meet customers' demands effectively. He quoted this example to enquire whether the Department's existing mobilizing system possessed this special feature. He considered that storing information on special needs of individual citizens, such as frequent callers for ambulance service or people chronically ill, could enable more effective prioritization for the deployment of ambulance resources. He suggested the Department consider acquiring such a database to meet the requirements of individual citizens with special needs while drawing up long-term plans. He further said that this might lead to higher cost, and the Department could consider levying a fee on those citizens. He quoted Singapore as an example where ambulance service was charged at 150 Singapore dollars (i.e. from HK\$700 to HK\$800) each time. He pointed out that this was a value-added ambulance service and could be applied to the fire-fighting service. The Department thanked the PLG member for his suggestion, and indicated that the Department did not have a system to store information on the special needs of citizens at present but would consider his opinion while drawing up long-term plans.

15. Performance Pledge of the Fire Services Department

15.1 The Department said this item was proposed by PLG members. The Department's performance pledge for 2004/05 would remain unchanged. The details were as follows:-

<u>Performance Pledge</u>	Target (%)
Building fire calls	92.5%
-- respond to building fire calls within the graded response	92.0%

time of 6 minutes in built-up areas	
-- respond to building fire calls within the graded response time of 9 to 23 minutes in areas of dispersed risks and isolated developments	94.5%
Emergency ambulance calls	92.5%
-- respond to emergency ambulance calls within a response time of 12 minutes	

16. Review and Improvement Plan on False Fire and Ambulance Calls and Delayed Responses

16.1 The Department indicated that according to the information on the 2003 year-end press conference, a PLG member pointed out that the Department should study ways for continuous performance improvement, e.g. ways to shorten the response time of fire appliances and ambulances. The Department could refer to the practice of other government departments and public organizations, such as the Water Supplies Department and Hongkong Electric Company Limited, when formulating the performance pledge by reviewing it from time to time. Moreover, false calls and false alarms wasted departmental resources. The Department could consider re-deployment of ambulance resources to reduce delayed responses of ambulances. In response to this, the Department replied that the existing administrative guidelines and measures were reviewed from time to time. The Department had taken into account the latest development of emergency services in other advanced countries and introduced the Third Generation Mobilizing System as a result, with a view to improving the situation of false calls/ delayed responses. In addition, due to improved design of the automatic alarm system and adoption of a series of measures, the number of false alarms decreased significantly by more than 3,100 cases last year. The percentage of responding to building fire calls within the graded response time was 94.19% last year, higher than 93.9% in 2002 by 0.29%. The relevant administrative measures were detailed as follows:

- a) Revising the installation standards of fire detection systems for elderly housing and small-unit buildings.
- b) Setting out clearly the requirements for installation of smoke detectors in university dormitories.
- c) Applications for changing fire service installations, such as replacing a smoke detector with a heat detector in the motor room, by property owners and management companies.

- d) Time Related System as announced in FSD Circular Letter No. 4/2001.
- e) Introduction of advanced and sophisticated detectors, e.g. systems giving off fire alarm signals only when smoke and heat were both detected.

16.2 With regard to improvement of performance in the emergency ambulance service, the Department had adopted the following administrative measures since last year, with the overall performance attaining 93.2% last year, exceeding the pledged target of 92.5% by 0.7%.

- a) More flexible deployment of ambulance resources.
- b) Introduction of staggered shift system in 17 ambulance depots to cope with the large number of ambulance calls during peak hours in the evening.
- c) Forming an Urgent Care Fleet, comprising 12 two-man crew ambulances to replace the ordinary three-man crew. The fleet was specially deployed for urgent calls (transferring patients in relatively critical conditions) in order to release manpower for emergency ambulance calls.

16.3 A PLG member indicated that leaflets on the Department's performance pledge were unavailable at district offices and only the 2003 performance pledge had been uploaded onto the departmental home page for public browsing. He suggested that the Department follow the practice of the Water Supplies Department by uploading the past ten years' performance pledges and achievements and the next ten years' performance pledges onto the departmental home page, with a view to increasing the transparency of the Department's operation. He also pointed out that the target response time had been set many years ago and a higher target should be set to boost public confidence in the Department's services. Moreover, the current target response time for fire and ambulance calls was 6 minutes and 12 minutes respectively, with the latter being double the former, which was undesirable. He indicated that the Legislative Council had discussed this matter in 2000 and the cause was limited resources in manpower and funding. He considered that the First Responder Programme could effectively improve the service and suggested that new technologies and measures such as re-structuring be adopted to improve the performance in response time. He pointed out that the Department could also follow the practice of other departments by setting the pledged target to near 100% to increase public confidence. The Department thanked the member for his suggestion,

and indicated it always attached great importance to increase transparency and was one of the first departments to publish its performance pledge. The Department would also follow up the arrangement of displaying performance pledge leaflets at district offices for distribution to the public and for their information. As to adopting the Water Supplies Department's practice in setting performance targets, the Department indicated that it was not difficult to list the performance pledges of the past ten years, but it was difficult to formulate the performance pledges for the next ten years at this stage because allocation of resources by the government in the future and the development of Hong Kong could hardly be predicted. The Department emphasized that the Director had announced early this year that the Department would strive to provide its pledged services despite the economic impact on resources. The Director had also encouraged staff members to do their best to add value to themselves. The Department indicated that it would formulate performance pledges based on available resources and upload the relevant information onto the departmental home page after finalizing the 2004/05 performance pledge.

16.4 A PLG member indicated that the non-emergency transfer service rendered by the Urgent Care Fleet, which comprised two-man crew ambulances, should be the responsibility of the Hospital Authority. Another PLG member would also like to know the working relationship between the Department's ambulance crew and St. John Ambulance Brigade. The Department explained to the meeting the difference between non-emergency calls and urgent calls. Non-emergency call service, such as assisting patients in stable condition in hospital admission and discharge, were provided by the Hospital Authority and the Auxiliary Medical Service. Urgent call service was the transfer of patients in relatively unstable condition to other hospitals. For example, sending the patient to a hospital with more advanced equipment for more intensive care. In such cases, the patient would be taken care of by both the nurse and the ambulanceman. As for St. John Ambulance Brigade, only auxiliary ambulance service was provided due to limited manpower. But the Department would also request their service if necessary.

17. Departmental Expenses of the Fire Services Department

17.1 The Department said that a PLG member had raised the following question via fax: "I learn from the newspapers that salary accounted for 90% of the Department's expenses. Is it true? I hope the Department could explain to the public that the expenditure on items like training equipment is also very high, so as to avoid public misconception that outdated equipment has to be used because staff

salary is too high.” The Department indicated that salary accounted for about 90% of the overall recurrent expenditure because the Department was devoted to serving the community and had over 9,000 staff. However, the Department emphasized that much attention had been devoted to the protective clothing of staff members, and the Department would from time to time acquire equipment that could help increase operational efficiency, such as the heavy-duty nozzle mentioned earlier. The Department also continued to enhance the training of staff members, such as constructing the Breathing Apparatus and Tactical Training Block to upgrade their professional skills.

18. Maintenance of Face Masks

18.1 The Department said that a PLG member had raised the following question via fax: “Are the face masks used by firemen and the breathing apparatus team regularly checked and tested to see if they are in good working order? Moreover, I learn that after the SARS crisis, ambulancemen still wear N95 masks all the time. Is there any follow-up action on testing the performance of face mask and has any tests been done to measure their quality?” The Department explained to the meeting that the face mask used by the firemen was a component part of the breathing apparatus. To ensure the safety of the breathing apparatus user, the Department had laid down strict guidelines, requiring all breathing apparatus fitted with face mask to be tested properly. The test included daily check, monthly check and quarterly check. Daily check was conducted after receiving a new breathing apparatus, or when a staff member was designated to operate the breathing apparatus; monthly check was conducted monthly, after every drill and every cleaning exercise; quarterly check was conducted quarterly by the breathing apparatus officer.

18.2 The Department added that the N95 face mask used by the ambulance personnel was a product of 3M, which was available on the market and generally came in two sizes, regular and children. The manufacturer's product specification met the Department's requirement and standard, and the face masks purchased by the Department were mainly of regular size. The users did not have any problem in wearing these masks, and the Department had a set of guidelines on the use and wearing of N95 face masks. It was known that quality test was only done on biochemical protective equipment for the time being, which was not widely used in hospitals, so the Department would not consider conducting such tests at the moment.

19. Development and Implementation of Paramedic Service

19.1 The Department indicated that the ambulance crew had 180 ambulances with suitable paramedic personnel and equipment during the day, and 90 during the night. Moreover, all ambulance aid motorcycles of the Department could provide paramedic ambulance service. Besides all frontline Ambulance Officers, 631 (i.e. 80%) out of 790 ambulance supervisors (of Principle Ambulanceman or Senior Ambulanceman rank) had attained the qualification of Emergency Medical Assistant II. The development of paramedic ambulance service was making good progress, and the Department was confident that full implementation would be possible in the first quarter of next year as scheduled.

Any Other Business

20. Change of Fire Services Department's Web Site Address

20.1 The Department informed the meeting that to make government web sites more user-friendly for public access, with effect from 1 May 2004, the web site addresses of all government departments would be in the form of *www.<short title of department>.gov.hk*. The Fire Services Department's web site address would then change from *www.info.gov.hk/hkfsd* to **www.hkfsd.gov.hk**.

21. Fire Service Statistics

21.1 A PLG member suggested that the Department follow the practice of Singapore's Civil Defense Force by uploading the statistics on fire and ambulance calls to the Department's website for public access, so as to enhance public understanding of the Department's work. The Department thanked the PLG member for the suggestion, and pointed out that the Department would refer to successful projects of foreign countries from time to time. The First Responder Programme was such an example. The Department would continue to keep abreast of the latest development in the world, and introduce measures appropriate for local adoption.

22. There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:35 p.m.

Fire Services Department
March 2004