

**The 13<sup>th</sup> Fire Services Department Public Liaison Group**  
**Notes of the Second Meeting**

The second meeting of the 13<sup>th</sup> Fire Services Department Public Liaison Group (PLG) was held at the Multi-purpose Hall, G/F, Fire Services Headquarters Building on 31 October 2006 at 6:30 p.m.

**Opening Remarks**

The Department welcomed all members to the second meeting of 13<sup>th</sup> PLG.

**2. Confirmation of the Notes of the Last Meeting**

2.1 The notes of the last meeting were confirmed without amendments.

**Matters Arising from Previous Meeting**

**3. Activities of the PLG**

3.1 The Department told members that since the last meeting, it had invited members to attend the Prevention of Hillfire and Conservation of Countryside Campaign. Members would be invited to attend the following activities later on:

Date	Name of Activity
12.11.2006	Tai Po District Fire Safety Carnival cum Tai Po Fire Station & Ambulance Depot Open Day
19.11.2006	Ambulance Service Campaign 2006
19.11.2006	Fanling Fire Station cum Fanling Ambulance Depot Open Day
10.12.2006	Fire Prevention Campaign Launching Ceremony 2006-2007

A PLG member had suggested the Department to organize a visit to the Airport Fire Station and AFC Rescue Control, so as to know more about the operation of the Airport Fire Station. After discussion, the Department agreed to arrange for members to visit the Airport Fire Station at a later time. If there were quota left, each member could bring one relative or friend to join the visit and application was on a first-come-first-served basis. The Secretary of the PLG would inform members of the details later. In addition, each participant was required to submit a copy of identity document for the application of a temporary permit for entry of the Airport Fire Station, which was a restricted area.

**4. Dispatching Ambulance in Order of Priority**

4.1 The Department stated that the Steering Committee on Medical Priority Dispatch System would continue to study the proposal. The meeting agreed to delete this item from the agenda of the next meeting.

## **5. Performance Pledge of Fire Services Department**

- 5.1 The Department said that, as at September, all the building fire calls and emergency ambulance calls handled by the Department had met the standard set out in the performance pledge. It would keep up the performance in respect of target response time. The meeting agreed to delete this item from the agenda of the next meeting.

## **6. Making the Best Use of Community Resources to Promote Fire Protection, Calamity Prevention and Hazard Abatement**

- 6.1 The Department said that up to that time, a total of 12 Fire Safety Ambassador Honorary Presidents' Associations (FSAHPA) had been established in the following districts:

Hong Kong: Wan Chai, Island and Southern District

Kowloon: YauTsimMong, Wong Tai Sin, Shamshuipo, Kwun Tong and Kowloon City

New Territories: Shatin, North District, Tsuen Wan and Kwai Tsing

Moreover, FSAHPA would be established in Tai Po and Hong Kong Eastern District in December, while other districts were actively planning for the establishment of FSAHPA as well. The Department expected that with the promotion and support of FSAHPA, community resources would be utilized more effectively for the promotion of the Fire Safety Ambassador (FSA) Scheme in all districts.

- 6.2 One of the PLG members had enquired about when the new "Award Scheme for Fire Safety Ambassadors" would be implemented. The Department replied that the award scheme had been running for a period of time. The Department had worked out a new scheme after reviewing and revising the accumulated merit points. According to the new calculation method, it would be easier for ambassadors to receive the Gold or Silver Award. Once the new scheme was finalized, the Department would announce its implementation by means of leaflets, the FSA webpage as well as the FSA newsletter.
- 6.3 In response to the comments of the PLG member on the election of Fire Safety Ambassador Management Committee of Kowloon City, the Department said that the operation of the committee was just on the track since the committee had been established one year earlier. It had therefore decided after deliberation to invite the committee members to continue their positions for one more year to ensure a smooth operation of the committee.

## **7. Recruitment Arrangement**

- 7.1 A PLG member had pointed out that recently there had been reports in newspapers about the "massive exodus of ambulancemen" due to low morale and bleak prospect. This would not only result in a waste of training resources, but also affect the quality of ambulance service. That member hoped that the Department would provide data on the wastage and vacancy of ambulancemen and firemen for the past two years, as well as the recruitment details of the Department. The Department replied that the reasons of staff wastage included natural wastage (e.g. retirement and early retirement due to invalidity), resignation or transfer etc. The relevant data for the past two years was as follows:

	Fireman (No. of persons)		Ambulanceman (No. of persons)	
	Year 04/05	Year 05/06	Year 04/05	Year 05/06
Natural Wastage (Whole Grade)	104	36	45	91
Resignation	3	3	2	2
Vacancy as at 17.10.2006	44		41	

The Department had an establishment of several thousand uniformed staff, so it was normal for the Fireman and Ambulanceman grades to have over 40 vacancies each. Retired staff constituted the major portion of natural wastage. Although the government had frozen the recruitment of civil servants, the Department would make special application to the government for open recruitment of staff to fill the vacancies. In fact, the results of open recruitment were very satisfactory. In the open recruitment exercise of 2004-05, there were 3968 and 2217 applicants applying for the posts of ambulanceman and fireman respectively; while in the open recruitment exercise of 2005-06, there were 3157 and 1278 applicants applying for the posts of ambulanceman and fireman respectively. The Department explained to the meeting that since eyesight test was not required for ambulanceman, the number of applicants for the post of ambulanceman was always higher than that of fireman.

- 7.2 That member asked whether the Department would rebut the incorrect reports in newspapers. The Department expressed that it would make clarifications when the incorrect reports involved important issues. However, most of the newspapers reports nowadays usually included subjective opinions of the newspapers, and generally the clarifications made by government departments would not be published. Therefore it was very difficult to clarify the many incorrect reports published by newspapers.

## **8. Arrangements for Rescue Operation**

- 8.1 A PLG member stated that she had dialed 999 in respect of three different cases of traffic accidents. The police had asked that member about the details of the accidents before transferring the calls to the Fire Services Communication Centre (FSCC) for ambulance service. The member asked if these were the proper procedures. The Department explained that after the 999 Centre of the "Police Control and Command Centre (PCCC)" received a request for assistance, the PCCC staff would first inquire about the purpose of the caller and the nature of the incident. When it was confirmed that the incident required ambulance service, the call would be immediately transferred to the Ambulance Console of the FSCC, and the PCCC staff would monitor the conversation. It was understandable for the PCCC staff to ask the caller questions, because the PCCC had the responsibility and authority to verify whether the reported case was real and to identify its nature, so as to avoid any false report that was maliciously made or other unnecessary misunderstanding. That member said that the staff of the 999 Centre had asked if there was casualty at the scene. If there was no casualty, the call would not be transferred to the Fire Services Department. She pointed out that, as a layman, she did not have the professional knowledge to judge if there was any casualty. In response, the Department said that there were a lot of traffic accidents every day and if there was no casualty involved, which meant that the case would not be handled by ambulancemen, the Police would not refer such calls to the FSCC. He stated that if any irregularity in the work of the police was found, members could make enquiries or lodge a complaint to the police.

**9. API on Ambulance Service**

- 9.1 The Department told the meeting that the two themes used in the API were “A life at stake. Do not misuse the ambulance service.” and “Save Lives. Give Way to Ambulances”. The Department hoped that the API would help heighten the public awareness about the proper use of ambulance service and giving way to emergency vehicles. A PLG member said that currently there were no practical guidelines on giving way to emergency vehicles, and drivers might contravene traffic regulations when they gave way to ambulances. The Department expressed that emergency vehicles had journey records. If drivers contravened regulations for giving way to ambulances or fire appliances and were prosecuted, the court might exercise discretion and took into consideration the traffic situation at that time. The Department could also provide assistance to the drivers concerned when necessary.

**10. Fire Safety Mobile Publicity Unit**

- 10.1 The Department told the meeting that it had produced a fire prevention publicity booklet in Braille with the assistance of the Hong Kong Society for the Blind. This booklet was available at the Hong Kong Society for the Blind and the FSD Community Relations Section. Besides, the Hong Kong Society for the Blind intended to transform the VCDs entitled “What to do in case of fire” and “Fire Prevention in the Home” into audio CDs to enhance the promotion of fire prevention to the blind.

**11. Complaints concerning FSD**

- 11.1 This item had been fully reported in the last meeting. Members agreed to delete this item from the agenda of next meeting.

**12. FSD Website**

- 12.1 The Department told the meeting that the FSD had uploaded its internal publication “Elite” onto its website to promote public understanding of the Department. Members agreed to delete this item from the agenda of next meeting.

**13. First Responder**

- 13.1 This item had been fully reported in the last meeting. Members agreed to delete this item from the agenda of next meeting.

**14. FSD West Kowloon Rescue Training Centre**

- 14.1 The Department informed the meeting that the construction of the FSD West Kowloon Rescue Training Centre had been completed but not yet officially opened. The Department was training the instructors to man the centre, and it was expected that operational crews could undergo training at the centre starting from next month. The Department continued to introduce the training facilities in the centre, which included a simulated tunnel, a maze-like chamber for breathing apparatus training and a life fire

training chamber.

- 14.2 In response to a PLG member's question about why the Training Centre still had lights on at night, The Department said that the FSD West Kowloon Rescue Training Centre opened from 8:30am to 5:00pm. Apart from offices where there were staff working overtime, the lights of all other areas would be switched off. However, the Civil Aid Service would conduct training at night from time to time, and therefore the CAS Headquarters Building and the CAS drill yard would still be lighted at night. The Department added that before the Training Centre was formally handed over to FSD, the Architectural Services Department had also conducted light tests at night, which was normal procedure for new buildings.

**15. The Helmets of Fire Personnel**

- 15.1 This item had been fully reported in the last meeting. Members agreed to delete this item from the agenda of next meeting.

**16. Rescue Cushion**

- 16.1 This item had been fully reported in the last meeting. Members agreed to delete this item from the agenda of next meeting.

**17. Disciplinary Action**

- 17.1 A PLG member had expressed via fax that, according to a report of the Oriental Daily on 2 October 2006, a total of 9 members of FSD personnel had been arrested by police during the period of January to August. That member hoped that the Department could provide some information on this matter, and explain the procedures of handling cases involving arrested FSD members as well as the counselling offered to them. The Department explained that if any FSD member was convicted of a criminal offence, it would handle the case according to the provisions of the Fire Services Ordinance(Cap. 95). The Department would consider various factors, such as the gravity of the offence and the criminal record of the member, when taking internal actions. It would also give the member the opportunity of making representations and repentance. Besides, the supervisor of the member concerned would monitor his performance and give him proper advice. The Department gave a brief account of the criminal offences committed by the above 9 members arrested by the police and the punishment awarded by the Department.

**18. Overcrowding of Ambulances at Queen Elizabeth Hospital on 19 June 2006**

- 18.1 The Department informed the meeting that it had held a meeting with the Hospital Authority (HA) to redefine the catchment areas of Queen Elizabeth Hospital and Caritas Medical Centre and had obtained satisfactory results. The Department would continue to review the catchment areas of other hospitals with the HA. In response to the enquiry raised by a PLG member about whether abusing the ambulance service for the purpose of free travel or handling problems of domestic violence would constitute an offence of false reporting, the Department said that it had sought legal advice from the Department of Justice. The Department of Justice replied that the ambit of Section 28 "False Alarms of Fire" of the Fire Services Ordinance (Cap. 95) covered the act of knowingly making a

false ambulance call that life was endangered. However, it must be proved that (1) the person making the call should know that the information he gave was false and (2) the call must concern life being endangered. If the person defended that he did not know that the information was false or the call was not related to life being endangered, it was difficult to invoke Section 28 of the Fire Services Ordinance to make a prosecution. That member said that there had been a domestic violence case in which someone falsely claimed that the other party was mentally unbalanced and required the police to call an ambulance to remove the person to hospital. The Department responded that the police would separate the disputing parties for mediation when dealing with domestic dispute cases. If any person became too emotional, the police might request the ambulancemen to deliver the person to hospital. However, the ambulancemen would not take the initiative to send someone to hospital. The Department said that the example quoted above was not an offence of making a false call according to the Department of Justice. In cases of domestic dispute, the job of ambulancemen was not to solve or investigate the dispute but to cooperate with the police.

**19. The Third Generation Mobilizing System (TGMS)**

- 19.1 This item had been fully reported in the last meeting. Members agreed to delete this item from the agenda of next meeting.

**20. Hong Kong Fire Services Review (the Review)**

- 20.1 The Department told the meeting that it used to publish the Review every two years in the past. Starting from this year, the Review would be published annually. Members agreed to delete this item from the agenda of next meeting.

**21. Mongkok Ambulance Depot**

- 21.1 The Department told the meeting that there were still some furnishing works in progress in the newly constructed Mongkok Ambulance Depot, therefore the date of the opening ceremony had not been fixed yet. It was a normal practice for the Department to occupy new buildings when there were still some furnishing works to be finished.

**Other Business**

**22. Rescue Operations During Typhoon**

- 22.1 A PLG member had pointed out that a man had gone on swimming at Shek O Beach while the typhoon signal no. 3 and the red flag were hoisted one day in May 2006, and the lifeguard at the lookout post had used the public address system to advise the swimmer to return to the shore. The man was later carried by the current to a cliff where he climbed on it in time. After the firemen and ambulancemen arrived at the beach, they took a long time to save him because of the huge waves. Although no one was injured in the incident, rescue resources were wasted and the firemen's lives were endangered. That member opined that the public should stay at home if a typhoon signal or the black rain storm signal was hoisted, and beach-goers should not swim at beaches while the red flag was hoisted. He wanted to know whether the FSD could prosecute these people or send them fixed penalty tickets if they insisted on swimming at the beach while a typhoon signal was

hoisted like in the above case. The Department thanked the member for his suggestion and said that there was no ordinance in Hong Kong for the Government to ban people swimming at the beach or going out while a typhoon signal was hoisted. Therefore, the Department would not make any prosecution. Instead, the Department would only advise the public to treasure their lives. A member suggested that the Department may consider distributing publicity leaflets at beaches and send a warning letter to the man who had been rescued in the incident. The Department said that it would not be very useful to distribute leaflets, but it would consider reinforcing publicity.

### **23. Government Telephone Directory**

- 23.1 One PLG member had pointed out that some information in the “Telephone Directory of the Government and Related Organizations” on the Government website was incorrect. For example, the telephone number of Lam Tin Fire Station was wrongly printed as 2722 instead of 2772. The Department apologized and thanked Mr Wong for pointing out the mistake, adding that it would immediately correct the errors.

### **24. Fire incident in Pak Tin Estate**

- 24.1 A PLG member had enquired about the investigation progress of the fire incident in Pak Tin Estate. The Department replied that as the fire personnel could not find the casualty immediately after they had put out the fire, there was indeed room for improvement. It was believed that the Government would hold a coroner inquest into this incident at a later time. Moreover, as the Department was preparing the internal investigation report, it was not appropriate to disclose the details. Nevertheless, the Department had adopted a new measure after this incident. A fire scene would be searched twice to ensure that all the people would be taken care of in the future, i.e., after the first search, another search would be conducted by other fire personnel who had not searched the scene before. The Department had also reviewed the Operational Guidelines on Search and Rescue and enhanced the relevant training to avoid any similar incidents in the future.

### **25. Inter-hospital transfer services**

- 25.1 A PLG member had made the following enquires: “What is the progress of handing over “Priority Two Urgent Calls” from the Ambulance Command to the Auxiliary Medical Services (AMS)? Furthermore, if the plan is really to be implemented, would the Department employ fewer ambulancemen due to a decrease in the number of calls to be handled by ambulances? What is the number of “Priority Two Urgent Calls” in the previous year?” The Department explained that most ambulance calls received by the Department were emergency calls and the response time pledged by the Department was 12 minutes. Apart from emergency calls, the Department needed to handle some urgent calls whereby inter-hospital transfer services were provided. A call would be classified as “Priority One Urgent Call” if the patient’s condition was critical, e.g. the patient needed to undergo surgery as soon as possible. The ambulances attending “Priority One Urgent Calls” would arrive at the scene within 12 minutes. Other non-urgent inter-hospital transfer calls belonged to “Priority Two Urgent Calls” and the ambulances would arrive at the scene within one hour. It was suggested earlier that some “Priority Two Urgent Calls” be handed over to the AMS but this recommendation had not been implemented yet. There were many considerations, including whether the AMS had adequate training and resources to cope with “Priority Two Urgent Calls”, and how the doctors of the Hospital

Authority (HA) distinguish the two types of calls and allocate them to the FSD or the AMS appropriately, etc. Concerning the number of “Priority Two Urgent Calls”, the Department said that the figure in 2005 was 34,175.

**26. Engine of an ambulance on fire**

- 26.1 A PLG member had asked a question via fax on the investigation report and follow-up actions of an incident happened in Mei Foo Sun Chuen on 21 September this year. The Department said that at about 9 o'clock that morning, after an ambulance had picked up a patient in Mei Foo Sun Chuen and prepared to leave, there were smoke and fire coming out of the hood of the ambulance. The fire was instantly put out by the first responders on the scene and there was no casualty. The patient on board was transferred to another ambulance and sent to hospital. The ambulance was towed to the Electrical and Mechanical Services Department (EMSD) for repair after the incident. After investigation, it was found that the fire was caused by the disconnection of a tube inside the hood. With a view to preventing the recurrence of similar incidents, the EMSD had immediately checked the other 41 ambulances of the same model. Although similar disconnection problem was not found, a stabilizing device was installed in each of these ambulances to enhance protection.

**27. “The exhibition plan of the Fireboat Alexander Grantham”**

- 27.1 A PLG member had asked a question via fax about the details and progress of the exhibition plan of the Fireboat Alexander Grantham. The Department said that it had handed the “Fireboat Alexander Grantham” to the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) for exhibition purpose. The FSD learnt that restoration, design and production work etc. were being undertaken by the LCSD at the moment. The time to open the exhibition depended on the progress of the preparation work. Visitors could visit the exhibition hall nearby before boarding the “Fireboat Alexander Grantham”. The exhibition hall, which was about 400 square metres, would display related exhibits and broadcast multi-media programmes on the history of marine rescue and the fire boat fleet in Hong Kong. The LCSD would also arrange docents for visitors.

**28. The “Star of Life” Symbol**

- 28.1 A PLG member wanted to know the meaning of the new symbol painted on the bodies of ambulances. The Department explained that this symbol was called the “Star of Life” and was designed by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration of the USA. This symbol signified the professionalism of paramedic service and the six vertices of the star represented the six working procedures of paramedic service, i.e. “detection, reporting, response, on scene care, care in transit, and transfer to hospital”. In the hexagonal star, the plate snake festival stick was the god of Yaaz Nick’s for ancient Greece myth medicine and represented treatment and healing. Any medical organizations or teams might use the plate snake festival stick symbol to represent the medical service they provided. The Department put the “Star of Life” symbol on the bodies of ambulances to show that the paramedic service provided by FSD not only reached international standard, but also had professional and quality assurance.



**29. The arrangement of turntable ladder in fire stations**

- 29.1 A PLG member had enquired about the reason for not deploying turntable ladder to the Tsing Yi Island where there were many housing estates and tank farms. The Department explained that due to the limitation of resources, it could only deploy one turntable ladder in each district but not every fire station. If there was a no.1 fire on the Tsing Yi Island, the Department would deploy a turntable ladder to the scene from the Tsuen Wan Fire Station.

**30. “Government Transport” Stamps**

- 30.1 A PLG member had raised the following issue: “The Hong Kong Post Office has issued a set of stamps on Government transport. The information printed on the back of the First Day Cover says that there are 15 hydraulic platforms in the FSD currently. However, according to the FSD Review, there should be over 60 hydraulic platforms and 15 reserve hydraulic platforms in the Department. I would like to know whether the data provided by the Post Office is wrong.” The Department explained that it had actually 15 hydraulic platforms of the model displayed on the stamps and hydraulic platforms of other models, too.
- 30.2 Another PLG member stated that some newspapers queried why the Government only issued stamps on “fire appliance” but not on “ambulance”. The Department replied that in accordance with the requirement of the Hong Kong Post Office, each department could only choose one kind of vehicle to be printed on the stamps, and the FSD had chosen a fire appliance. One of the PLG members who was also a member of the Liaison Group of the Hong Kong Post Office indicated that the Post Office had a selection committee to vote on the design of the Government Transport stamps.

**Any Other Business**

**31. The 14<sup>th</sup> Fire Services Department Public Liaison Group**

- 31.1 The Department told the meeting that it would start to accept applications for membership of the 14<sup>th</sup> Fire Services Department Public Liaison Group early next year. The Group would compose of serving members and new members. The number of seats reserved for serving members would not exceed 15, i.e. no more than 5 seats for each region(Hong Kong Island, Kowloon and the New Territories). Upon expiry of their first term of one year, serving members might apply for re-appointment if they were invited by the Director of Fire Services, but they could not serve more than two consecutive years. The remaining seats would be filled by new members. This arrangement would allow more new members to join the group. If new applications outnumbered the vacant seats, applicants would be selected by a random draw.
32. There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:30p.m.