

**The 18<sup>th</sup> Fire Services Department Public Liaison Group**  
**Notes of the First Meeting**

The first meeting of the 18<sup>th</sup> Fire Services Department Public Liaison Group (PLG) was held at the Multi-Purpose Hall, G/F., Fire Services Headquarters Building on 27<sup>th</sup> July 2011 at 6:20 p.m..

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**Opening Remarks**

The Department welcomed all members to the first meeting of the 18<sup>th</sup> Fire Services Department (FSD) Public Liaison Group (PLG) and introduced each departmental representative in attendance.

**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 PLG**

3.1 The Department said that FSD had invited PLG members to attend the following activities in the past few months:

- Ching Ming Festival Hill Fire Prevention Activity (Hong Kong Island/Chai Wan) (3 April 2011)
- 2011 Ching Ming Festival Hill Fire Prevention Activity (New Territories/Tsing Yi and Tung Chung) (3 and 5 April 2011)
- Ching Ming Festival Hill Fire Prevention Activity (New Territories/Fanling) (4 and 5 April 2011)
- Fire prevention talk and publicity activity (New Territories/Tung Chung) (29 April 2011)

**4. Performance Pledges of FSD**

4.1 The Department mentioned that from 1 January to 30 June 2011, FSD responded to an average of 93.43% of fire incidents within the graded response time, while the response time performance of ambulance service was 93.38%. From January to June 2011, a total of 347 967 ambulance calls were received, i.e. 1 922 calls per day on average, representing an increase of 2.1% when compared with the same period of 2010.

## **5. Publicity Activities of FSD**

- 5.1 The Department told members that the number of visitors to the Fire Safety Education Bus had reached 6 370 by end of June and favourable response had been received from the public with numerous reservation requests. The Bus would keep touring around to schools, housing estates and community halls, etc. in different districts to conduct fire protection publicity and education.
- 5.2 The Department said that FSD had been collaborating with Radio 1 of Radio Television Hong Kong (RTHK) to produce 52 episodes of a 30-minute Fire Services radio programme, which was broadcast in “Happy Daily” on Fridays from 11:30 a.m. to 12:00 noon commencing 22 April. The Department aimed to disseminate latest information on fire and ambulance services and messages of fire protection, etc. through this new electronic platform. PLG members could review the broadcast episodes on the website of RTHK.
- 5.3 A PLG member stated that the Fire Safety Education Bus was available for booking from Mondays to Fridays. He suggested that the Department could provide additional booking sessions on Saturdays and Sundays to facilitate the public to visit the Bus on their day-offs.
- 5.4 The Department expressed that the Fire Safety Education Bus was currently available for booking by schools or other organisations on Saturdays and Sundays. Due to the favourable response resulting in Saturday and Sunday sessions having been already fully booked by other schools and organisations, PLG members might misconceived that the Bus was not available for booking on those days.

## **6. Maintenance, Repair and Replacement of Ambulances**

- 6.1 The Department indicated that FSD had already replaced 196 ambulances as scheduled. As at 8 July 2011, a total of 217 new ambulances were put into service, including 196 replacement ambulances and 21 additional ambulances. The additional ambulances would be deployed to deal with the ever-increasing ambulance calls. Besides, in the 2009 Resource Allocation Exercise, funding was granted for FSD to replace 39 town ambulances, two cross country ambulances and to purchase 25 additional town ambulances for providing additional ambulance shifts as well as maintenance and logistic support. These appliances (including 64 town ambulances and two ambulance land rovers) were expected to be delivered and commence operation in the second half of 2011.

## **7. Fire Protection and Ambulance Services Promotion Day**

- 7.1 The Department said that the Department was making preparations to produce a five-episode sequel to the Fire Services TV drama series with RTHK. The episodes were tentatively scheduled for broadcast on Saturdays from 7:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. on TVB Jade commencing February 2012.

7.2 The Department remarked that the Department would continue bringing to every household the messages of fire safety and proper use of ambulance services, etc. through TV drama, in order to enhance and deepen the public's understanding of these issues.

## **8. Future Developments of FSD**

8.1 The Department told members that FSD would review its fire and ambulance services from time to time. During the review, apart from the overall service quality, actual demand for fire stations and ambulance depots in various districts would also be evaluated with regard to the future development projects proposed by the Government. Resources would be sought from the Administration for improving or adjusting the existing facilities and staffing which were considered necessary.

8.2 In reply to a PLG member's suggestion of constructing a fire station and an ambulance depot in the vicinity of Tin Shui Wai (such as Hung Shui Kiu and Kam Sheung Road), The Department said that FSD had already earmarked a site in Hung Shui Kiu, Yuen Long, for the construction of a fire station and an ambulance depot in the future, thereby addressing the long-term development in the vicinity of Tin Shui Wai (including Hung Shui Kiu New Development Area).

## **9. Building Fire Safety Envoy**

9.1 Members agreed to delete this item.

## **10. HazMat Team**

10.1 Members agreed to delete this item.

## **11. Matters concerning Railway Strike**

11.1 Members agreed to delete this item.

## **12. Abuse of Ambulance Service**

12.1 A PLG member expressed in writing before the meeting that, there were reports on the serious misuse of ambulance service by Hong Kong people, so he asked what countermeasures the Department had to tackle with the problem. Furthermore, he understood that currently there was no legislation in Hong Kong to regulate those who abuse ambulance service. He wished to know whether there was such legislation overseas to regulate those abusers.

12.2 The Department replied that to prevent the abuse of ambulance service by the public, publicity and education on the proper use of ambulance service and avoiding misuse were considered as the first step. Ambulance Command of FSD promoted the message of proper use of ambulance service through a variety of channels, including the “School Outreach Scheme” in which FSD personnel would visit plenty of primary and secondary schools to educate students on the proper use of ambulance service. Besides, to make such information more accessible to the public, the Ambulance Command did not only organise “Do Not Misuse Ambulance Service Roving Exhibition” regularly in different communities, but also promoted the message of proper use of ambulance service through media such as television and radio. The “Ambulance Service Campaign 2011” broadcast on TVB Jade on 2 July 2011, the Fire Services TV drama series previously produced by RTHK and the radio drama series currently being broadcast were just a few examples illustrating how such messages were disseminated through a multi-pronged approach. He called upon PLG members to support the “Do Not Misuse Ambulance Service Roving Exhibition” to be held at Sha Tin Town Hall Plaza on 20 August 2011. As regards whether there was legislation overseas to regulate abusers of ambulance service, the Department said that the Department did not have relevant information.

12.3 A PLG member asked about the effectiveness of the publicity activities on the proper use of ambulance service. The Department said that the Department would instil the concept of proper use of ambulance service into the public through publicity, education and various activities in the first place, and hope that members of the public could bring the message to their friends.

12.4 A PLG member enquired whether FSD would consider imposing charges on people using emergency ambulance service. The Department replied that imposing charges on people using emergency ambulance service would involve legislative amendments. Moreover, imposition of charges was not the best way to prevent the public from abusing ambulance service. Taking the introduction of admission charges in Accident and Emergency Departments as an example, he illustrated that the number of accident and emergency attendances indeed dropped at the very beginning when the new measure was implemented, but the number had been increasing subsequently. In view of this, the Department considered publicity and education the first step to educate the public on the proper use of ambulance service and avoiding misuse.

## **New Items**

### **13. Recruitment Matters**

13.1 A PLG member asked in writing before the meeting whether a “Psychometric Test” had been incorporated into FSD’s recruitment exercise to test the candidates’ suitability for fire/ambulance duties. The Department said that the Department currently had no plan to introduce a “Psychometric Test” to test the candidates’ suitability for fire/ambulance duties. However, the Department

would pay close attention to the effectiveness of the Police Force to recruit suitable candidates after introducing the “Psychometric Test”.

#### **14. Matters concerning Fire Safety Inspections**

14.1 A PLG member enquired in writing before the meeting whether the Department had conducted regular inspections to “blackspot” buildings with high fire risk, such as Tai On Building, Chung King Mansions, Mirador Mansions and State Theatre Building, etc. He asked whether the Department would consider inviting Fire Safety Ambassadors (FSA)/Building Fire Safety Envoys of the respective district to assist in inspection. The Department expressed that FSD had adopted a brand new “four-pronged” approach since 2008 to improve fire safety in old buildings. The “four prongs” were:

- (1) Inviting District Fire Safety Committees, FSAs and the FSA Honorary President Associations to promote fire safety messages in those old buildings.
- (2) Setting up a “Special Enforcement Unit” through internal re-deployment to step up inspections of old buildings, in order to eradicate potential fire hazards.
- (3) When the potential fire hazards were removed, the building should be under regular inspections by Fire Officers in the district.
- (4) The Building Fire Safety Envoy of the building would also conduct frequent inspections to ensure that such irregularities would not appear again.

14.2 The Department continued that FSD would identify some target buildings with constant fire hazards in densely-populated areas to implement the “four-pronged approach”, in a bid to enhance the fire safety standard of the buildings by removing all fire hazards in every possible way. In response to the question raised by the PLG member, The Department stated that Chong King Mansions and Mirador Mansions had completed all the “four prongs” and were under regular inspections by local fire stations. Building Fire Safety Envoys of those buildings would also conduct inspections from time to time.

14.3 A PLG member expressed that he learnt of the serious problem of “sub-divided units” in old buildings from the recent fires in To Kwa Wan and Chung King Mansions. He asked whether FSD and other relevant departments had set up a common building database for accessing latest information of the buildings concerned. Besides, he also enquired in case “sub-divided units” were found, which department would be responsible for law enforcement. He also pointed out that even if Building Fire Safety Envoys discovered irregularities in their buildings, they did not have the authority to take law enforcement actions. Therefore, he opined that Fire Safety Envoys did not have significant effectiveness.

14.4 The Department replied that the Buildings Department (BD) was currently responsible for the inspection of building structures and designs. In case irregularities in building structures and designs, such as “sub-divided units”, were found, the BD would take law enforcement actions. For irregularities in buildings involving fire service installations or equipment, FSD personnel would conduct inspections and exercise the power conferred on them by the Fire Services Ordinance to take law enforcement actions.

14.5 The Department told the meeting that no inter-departmental building database had been set up at present. If there were signs that the building structures and designs had been modified, BD personnel would conduct inspections and take law enforcement actions. To familiarise frontline FSD personnel with the environment of the district and the operation of fire service installations and equipment in buildings or warehouses, the Department would arrange them to participate in inspections from time to time to enhance their operational efficiency. Regarding the Building Fire Safety Envoy Scheme, FSD understood that the envoys did not have the statutory power to take law enforcement actions. However, the Department encouraged them to report or refer fire hazards and irregularities in buildings to fire stations or authorities concerned, with a view to assisting relevant personnel in taking law enforcement actions to ensure building fire safety.

## **15. Medical Priority Dispatch System**

15.1 A PLG member asked in writing before the meeting about the implementation progress of the Medical Priority Dispatch System (MPDS).

15.2 The Department said that the implementation of MPDS aimed to provide more effective ambulance response to people in critical need. The outcome of a public consultation showed that most of the respondents agreed that ambulance responses should be prioritised in accordance with the degree of urgency of the calls. In view of the public’s general support for the principles and broad framework of the MPDS, the Department would continue to study the feasibility and the way forward of the MPDS in line with the above principles.

## **16. Cross-border Ambulance Services**

16.1 A PLG member expressed in writing before the meeting that, as far as he knew, Mainland ambulances were not allowed to enter Hong Kong. Patients returning from the Mainland had to transfer to Hong Kong ambulances at the border control point. He requested the Department to provide monthly figures on the number of cases involving patients returning to Hong Kong for treatment via the above channel. Moreover, he asked whether it was the case that the Security Bureau/FSD would not consider allowing Mainland ambulances to enter Hong Kong.

16.2 The Department replied that the relevant monthly figures on the number of cases involving patients returning from the Mainland to Hong Kong for treatment handled by the Department were for internal reference only, so such figures could not be provided to PLG members for the moment. Besides, the issue of permitting Mainland ambulances to enter Hong Kong was beyond the purview of FSD, so the Department was not in a position to respond.

## **17. New Fire Tunics**

17.1 A PLG member requested the Department in writing before the meeting to provide a brief comparison of the differences between the old and new fire-fighting protective suits. In addition, he asked whether the new fire tunics had been put into service-wide use. If yes, he wished to know the staff response to the new fire tunics and whether the performance of the new suit was satisfactory.

17.2 The Department briefly introduced the differences between the old and new fire-fighting protective suits in the meeting:

<b>Items compared</b>	<b>Old fire-fighting protective suit</b>	<b>New fire-fighting protective suit</b>
Manufacturing materials of the outer shell of the fire-fighting protective suit:	Nomex Delta T fire resistant fabric	PBI and Aramide fire resistant fabric
Colour of the fire-fighting protective suit:	Deep blue	Golden yellow
Specification and standard:	Both met the European Standard EN 469:2005 "Protective clothing for firefighters - Performance requirements for protective clothing for firefighting"	
Flame test by means of dummy wearing the fire-fighting protective suit:	Tested under 800 °C for ten seconds	Tested under 1 093 °C for eight seconds

17.3 The Department said that the new fire-fighting protective suit had been put into service-wide use as the personal protective equipment of fire personnel since 1 April 2011. The new fire-fighting protective suit had enhanced resistance to heat and high temperature. FSD members in general welcomed the introduction of the new fire-fighting protective suit and considered its performance and effects satisfactory.

17.4 The Department mentioned there was recent report that the new fire-fighting protective suit had a relatively low air permeability. In this connection, the Department had reviewed the new fire-fighting protective suit and issued guidelines, allowing frontline personnel to loosen or take off their protective suits under safe conditions, thereby relieving the impact of heat stress on staff.

## **18. Procurement Issues of FSD**

18.1 A PLG member expressed in writing before the meeting that, some newspapers had brought up the need for FSD to improve its procurement arrangement, while the Efficiency Unit (EU) had also put forward a number of recommendations to the Department. He asked whether the Department had implemented EU's recommendations, such as introducing procurement professionals and computerisation of the management system.

18.2 The Department said that FSD attached great importance to the recommendations put forward by the EU. In this connection, the Department had appointed a Chief Fire Officer to coordinate the implementation of these recommendations, which included:

- On 1 April 2011, the "Safety and Logistics Group" was reorganised into the "Procurement and Logistics Group", comprising the Logistics Unit which had experience in procurement as well as fire personnel with operational experience, to coordinate all procurement projects.
- Improving the procurement capabilities of the "Procurement and Logistics Group" from various aspects such as planning and process, organisation, performance management and information technology.
- The Department would adopt a centre-led procurement model to cater for projects with various levels of complexity.
- The Department was developing an "Asset Management and Maintenance System" to enhance procurement efficiency and effectiveness. The key modules included planning, acquisition, placing orders, inventory control, asset management, repair and maintenance, and disposal of old equipment, etc.

## **19. Naming of Ranks**

19.1 A PLG member expressed in writing before the meeting that, the ranks in most of other disciplined services in Hong Kong were Director, Deputy Director, Assistant Director, etc. in descending order. He asked whether the Department would consider renaming Chief Fire Officer (CFO) to Assistant Director (AD), and Deputy Chief Fire Officer (DCFO) to Chief Divisional Officer (CDO), to tally with those of other disciplined services in Hong Kong. Besides, he opined that ranks in the Ambulance Command should also be renamed.

19.2 The Department indicated that with a view to enhancing communication with the community and our working partners, the Department had started to review with the Security Bureau the feasibility of renaming the posts of CFO/Chief Ambulance Officer/DCFO/Deputy Chief Ambulance Officer, and the review was still underway. However, to prevent the renaming of titles from hindering law enforcement actions taken by officers of relevant ranks as stipulated under the Fire Services Ordinance, the rank title of CFO would not be renamed.

## **20. Fire Appliances**

- 20.1 A PLG member asked about the latest development concerning the GIMAEX hydraulic platforms. Besides, he asked when the Department would finish replacing all the hydraulic platforms with a servicing period of more than ten years. He also enquired whether the Department would consider procuring hydraulic platforms commonly used overseas.
- 20.2 The Department expressed that for the sake of safety, FSD had temporarily ceased using the GIMAEX hydraulic platforms delivered and would consider putting the new hydraulic platforms into service again after all the problems had been duly solved. FSD, Electrical and Mechanical Services Department and Government Logistics Department were discussing with the manufacturer on matters relating to the GIMAEX hydraulic platforms, the process of which might involve contractual responsibility, so detailed progress could not be disclosed to the public for the moment. As regards the progress of replacing hydraulic platforms with a servicing period of more than ten years, as the “normal servicing period” of hydraulic platforms was 15 years, FSD would seek funding approval to replace them when they had been put into service for 12 to 13 years.
- 20.3 Regarding the enquiry about whether the Department would procure hydraulic platforms commonly used overseas, The Department remarked that FSD’s existing fleet of fire appliances could be favourably compared with those used by fire brigades in other advanced countries. Given the unique nature of fire-fighting operations in Hong Kong, functions of the appliances required could not be directly compared with fire brigades overseas. Nonetheless, FSD still adopted a forward-looking procurement strategy, which included making reference to the experience of other advanced fire brigades, closely monitoring new development in fire appliances and availability of new models for procurement, so as to further ensure the safety and efficiency of frontline personnel in fire-fighting and rescue operations.
- 20.4 A PLG member asked whether the Department would consider purchasing fire appliances which could reach higher locations, such as turntable ladder or aerial ladder platform, or more suitable equipment and appliances to handle fire incidents in different fire grounds.
- 20.5 The Department stated that, in tandem with the overall development of Hong Kong, the Department was constantly reviewing the standard of rescue service, so as to cope with various types of incidents, including the needs for handling high rise building fire. Despite the increased working heights of the turntable ladders or aerial ladder platforms used by the Department, buildings were scaling new heights so that the turntable ladders or aerial ladder platforms specially deployed for external high angle rescue operations might not be able to deal with the situation. Besides, turntable ladders or aerial ladder platforms with a greater height had some limitations in operation. For example, the vehicle body might be too long to pass through narrow streets swiftly. The Department continued that in regard to fire-fighting and rescue strategies, fire personnel did not only

conduct high angle rescue operations externally to suppress building fire at high locations, but also made use of the fire service installations in the building to assist in fire-fighting. The Department would keep in view latest development in fire-fighting and rescue techniques overseas and review its equipment and appliances from time to time, in order to cope with various types of emergency incidents.

### **Any Other Business**

#### **21. Communication Equipment in Country Parks**

21.1 A PLG member asked in case members of the public encountered an accident when visiting the countryside and signals of mobile phone networks were not received, how they could seek help from departments concerned and how these departments would rescue the casualties.

21.2 The Department said that emergency telephones were provided in country parks in Hong Kong. In case of accidents or incidents, members of the public could seek help by phone at designated emergency telephone booths. Furthermore, telecommunication service providers had provided a dedicated helpline (112), allowing members of the public to seek help by phone when there were no signals. If those in distress were located uphill or somewhere difficult to reach, the Department would notify the Government Flying Service (GFS) for conveyance of FSD personnel to such locations for rescue operations. GFS would also convey the casualties to hospitals nearby for treatment.

**22. There being no other business, the meeting was adjourned at 7:30 p.m.**

Fire Services Department  
October 2011