

The 20th Fire Services Department Public Liaison Group
Notes of the Second Meeting

The second meeting of the 20th Fire Services Department Public Liaison Group (PLG) was held at the Multi-Purpose Hall, G/F., Fire Services Headquarters Building on 3rd December 2013 at 6:30 p.m..

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Opening Remarks

The Department welcomed all members to the second meeting of the 20th 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 the PLG

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

- Do Not Misuse Ambulance Service Roving Exhibition (24 August, 4 September and 23 November 2013)
- Inter-departmental hill fire and mountain rescue operation exercise (17 September 2013)
- 164th Passing-out Parade (24 September 2013)
- Fire Prevention Campaign (27 September 2013)
- Tuen Mun Fire Station Open Day (9 November 2013)
- Fire Safety Parade (Sea and Land) (17 November 2013)
- *Ambulance Elites' Caring Show* (27 November 2013)
- Visit to the Airport Fire Contingent (8 December 2013)

4. Performance Pledges of the FSD

4.1 The Department mentioned that during the period from 1 January to 30 September 2013, the FSD responded to a total of 28 643 fire incidents and 22 995 cases of special service. On average, 93.35% of the fire incidents were responded to within the graded response time. During the said period, a total of 537 724 ambulance calls were received, i.e. 1 970 calls per day on average with a response time performance of 94.31%.

5. Publicity Activities of the FSD

5.1 The Department told the meeting that as at the end of November 2013, the number of visitors to the Fire Safety Education Bus had reached 50 943 and the Department had received a tremendous amount of booking requests. The Bus would continue to visit schools, housing estates and community halls, etc. in various districts to conduct fire safety promotion and education activities. Regarding fire prevention publicity on radio, the FSD would continue to collaborate with RTHK Radio 1 to produce a half-hour show in the radio programme *Happy Daily*. The show, in the form of drama, interview or phone-in session, would be broadcast every Friday from 1130 to 1200 hours. On a separate note, the video recording of the kick-off ceremony of this year's Fire Prevention Campaign took place on 27 September 2013 at Studio 1 of TVB in Tseung Kwan O. The TV show was broadcast on TVB Jade and HD Jade on 5 October 2013 from 2030 to 2130 hours.

6. Maintenance, Repair and Replacement of Ambulances

6.1 The Department said that during the period from 5 January 2009 to 13 November 2013, a total of 383 new ambulances had been put into service, including 290 replacement ambulances, two Ambulance Land Rovers and 91 additional ambulances. These additional ambulances would be deployed to deal with the ever-increasing ambulance calls and strengthen maintenance and logistic support. Moreover, the FSD would also replace 10 and procure 25 town ambulances by the end of 2014.

7. Fire Protection and Ambulance Services Promotion

- 7.1 The Department said that the Department was producing a new fire safety promotion DVD package on topics including household fire prevention and means of escape for the physically immobile persons in case of fire. The Department was vetting the first draft of the clips and the production was scheduled for completion in the first quarter of 2014. In addition, the Department's Fire Safety Education in Kindergartens Programme, which was launched in November 2011, had received very favourable response. As at the end of October 2013, 1 108 kindergartens (with a total of 70 607 children) had taken part in the Programme. The kindergartens that the FSD had visited had been asked to fill out a survey and provide their feedback, and the majority of these schools concurred that the Programme was extremely productive and hoped that it would be continued. The Department said that the Department hoped that members of the public could acquire the knowledge on fire protection and realise the importance of fire safety early in their lives, and that the schoolchildren would bring the message home, thereby enhancing the knowledge of fire protection among the general public.
- 7.2 Regarding the promotion of the message of "do not misuse ambulance service", the Department mentioned that after the previous meeting, the Ambulance Command had worked with the Hospital Authority, the Auxiliary Medical Service and the Hong Kong St. John Ambulance in organising three "Do Not Misuse Ambulance Service Roving Exhibitions" on 24 August, 14 September and 23 November 2013 at the Hong Kong Cultural Centre in Tsim Sha Tsui, Tuen Mun Cultural Square and Tsz Wan Shan Estate Central Playground respectively.
- 7.3 The Department continued that the Ambulance Command had held education talks on ambulance services, ambulance aid knowledge and proper use of ambulance resources in 36 primary and secondary schools as at the end of November 2013. The Ambulance Service Publicity Vehicle had also been deployed from time to time to various locations in Hong Kong, including primary and secondary schools, community centres and private/public housing estates to hold roving exhibitions. Since its operation in February 2013, the Ambulance Service Publicity Vehicle had attracted about 11 500 visitors as at the end of November and was well received by the public.

7.4 The Department said that to drum up publicity for the ambulance service, the Department had filmed the *Ambulance Elites' Caring Show* on 27 November 2013 and the programme would be broadcast on TVB Jade and HD Jade on 14 December.

8. Future Developments of the FSD

8.1 Regarding a PLG member's question about whether the Department would re-provision Shau Kei Wan Fire Station, the Department said that the FSD would review its fire and ambulance services from time to time, and the re-provisioning of a fire station depended on a number of reasons. For example, if the existing station required the deployment of additional fire appliances or ambulances, but there was a lack of space in the station and no suitable sites were available in the district, the FSD would consider the possibility of re-provisioning the station. At the moment, the FSD did not have plans to re-provision Shau Kei Wan Fire Station.

9. Post-dispatch Advice

9.1 The Department said that as at the end of October 2013, Fire Services Communications Centre (FSCC) operators had provided post-dispatch advice for 12 923 cases, including 9 700 bleeding cases, 1 230 fracture and dislocation of limbs cases, 347 burn cases, 1 480 convulsion cases, 141 heat stroke cases and 25 hypothermia cases. During the period from 1 May 2011 to 31 October 2013, the FSD conducted a telephone survey of callers who had received post-dispatch advice. Of the 6 892 respondents, 99.2% were satisfied with the post-dispatch advice they received; 99.2% agreed that the advice was useful for handling the patients; and 99.7% agreed that the Department should continue to provide post-dispatch advice in the future.

9.2 A PLG member asked whether the service would cause delay in picking up other callers' calls by the FSCC operators, since it would normally take a longer time for the operators to provide post-dispatch advice to callers. He also asked whether the FSD had a performance pledge of the time it took the operators to pick up the 999 hotline. The Department said that according to the existing practice, FSCC operators would carry out deployment first after taking a call. If the case involved the six types of symptoms listed in paragraph 9.1 above, the operator would contact the caller later on and asked them if they were willing to receive post-dispatch advice. The Department said that at the moment there

were a number of operator consoles in the FSCC and they were manned by different staff. If a particular console was busy with calls, operators of other consoles would help share the workload. Currently, the FSD performed satisfactorily regarding the percentage of calls handled within the target response time, and there was no need for the PLG members to worry about the existing operation being affected by the provision of post-dispatch advice. As for whether the FSD had a performance pledge of the time it took the FSCC operators to pick up the 999 hotline, the Department said the Department had no such pledge; however, at present the FSCC operators would immediately pick up calls transferred from the 999 call centre to the FSD, and the calls were handled almost simultaneously.

- 9.3 A PLG member also asked whether FSD personnel were responsible for conducting the survey of callers who had received post-despatch advice. The Department replied that at the moment, the telephone survey was conducted by FSD staff when time permitted.

10. Reduction in Conditioned Working Hours of Fire Personnel

- 10.1 The Department said that as the trial scheme's second phase, which lasted for about three months, had been running smoothly and achieved the desired result, the policy bureau approved the launch of the third phase by the Department starting 5 October 2013. In this phase, the trial scheme was put into full implementation in the Hong Kong, Kowloon and New Territories Commands, as well as in other related fire units. The trial scheme had been running smoothly since its launch. The trial period would generally last for three years, but the policy bureau would consider whether adjustment for the actual duration was needed depending on the trial results.

- 10.2 A PLG member asked whether the FSD would cut down on fire resources after launching the trial scheme of the "New 51 Proposal", and hoped the Department would provide information on the scheme. The Department said that any proposals relating to the reduction of the hours of work had to meet the three pre-conditions, i.e. "cost-neutral", "no additional manpower" and "maintaining the same level of service to the public". In this regard, the Department would only reallocate the existing resources to achieve the goal of reduced hours of work. He would provide the details of the "New 51 Proposal" trial scheme after the meeting.

[Post-meeting note: the measures implemented under the “New 51 Proposal” trial scheme included:

- (i) reducing the number of Firemen manning each Major Rescue Unit (MRU), Light Rescue Unit (LRU) and most Major Pumps (MP) by one;
- (ii) reducing the number of Senior Firemen (Control) of the Airport Fire Station Rescue Controls by one;
- (iii) replacing the MP of Sai Kung Fire Station with a Light Pumping Appliance (LPA);
- (iv) changing the rank of the officer-in-charge of the Airport Fire Contingent’s two Rapid Intervention Vehicles from Assistant Divisional Officer to Senior Station Officer or Station Officer; and
- (v) reducing the number of Firemen manning the Breathing Apparatus Tender of Tung Chung Fire Station by three.]

11. Matters Concerning the New Hydraulic Platform

11.1 Members agreed to delete this item from next meeting’s agenda.

12. Incidents Happening in the Airport

12.1 Members agreed to delete this item from next meeting’s agenda.

New Items

13. Incident & Fire Safety Support Unit (IFSSU)

13.1 A PLG member enquired in writing about the following before the meeting:

- (i) the functions of the newly established IFSSU and the existing Compartment Fire Specialist (CFS) team;
- (ii) the kinds of incidents that required the support of the IFSSU and CFS at the scene;

- (iii) the roster system of the IFSSU (24-hour shift or normal office hours); and
- (iv) whether the Extra-large Van (F910) used by the IFSSU was modified from a retired vehicle and if yes, whether the FSD had any plans to procure new vehicles for replacement.

13.2 Regarding the functions of the IFSSU, the Department informed the meeting that IFSSU members would act as the reserve for the operational Commands and provided operational support when the members of these Commands were engaged in compartment fire behaviour training. Incidents to be handled by the IFSSU included building fires of Alarm No. 3 or above; Alarm No. 1 fires in which the incident control officer (ICO) considered that the circumstances warranted the support from a search and rescue team; and other incidents in which the ICO considered a massive manpower support was needed, e.g. major incidents of special services, Alarm No. 2 fires or fires at recyclable material storage sites. The IFSSU also provided fire safety support, e.g. conducting fire safety promotion activities in communities recently affected by fire and conducting large-scale fire safety promotion activities before festivals.

13.3 The Department said that the duty hours of the IFSSU were from 0900 to 1700 hours. IFSSU members would be enlisted when members of the operational Commands underwent compartment fire behaviour training. As for the Extra-large Van (F910) that was currently dedicated to the IFSSU, it was indeed modified from a retired vehicle. However, the Department was planning to procure a new vehicle for replacement.

13.4 Regarding the functions of the CFS team, the Department informed the meeting that it would be summoned to the scene of building fires of Alarm No. 3 or above, or when the officer-in-charge (OIC) of the incident requested its presence. The team would assist the OIC in assessing the fire situation and fire development, and engage in fire-fighting when necessary. For example, the CFS team would assist the OIC in assessing whether a flashover would occur and observe whether the FSD members at the scene were using appropriate fire-fighting techniques. Therefore, members of the CFS team had to be seasoned fire-fighters.

14. Urban Search and Rescue (USAR) Team

14.1 A PLG member submitted a written enquiry about whether the FSD would

enlarge the establishment of the USAR Team and how the FSD would enhance the Team's rescue techniques, as numerous old districts were being redeveloped and railway infrastructure projects were underway, resulting in increased risks for major incidents. He also asked whether the FSD could arrange for PLG members to visit the training venue of the USAR Team to enhance their understanding of the Team. The Department said that there were currently 140 members in the USAR Team and they were deployed to the fire stations designated for USAR tasks in the three operational Commands. The FSD had recruited and provided training for 15 new Team members in September 2013. The Team would regularly arrange for members to be trained at the USAR Training Ground in Sheung Shui, and training items included the application of search and rescue equipment and the technique of using heavy-duty break-in equipment, etc. The commander of the Special Rescue Squad would coordinate relevant rescue operations, e.g. by deploying the High Angle Rescue Team to assist in retrieving casualties from deep under the ground. The USAR Team had also taken part in the search and rescue operations of the Wenchuan earthquake in Sichuan, the collapse of a building on Ma Tau Wai Road, as well as other landslide incidents. It had also been on standby for several times in response to earthquakes in Mainland China. However, as the Mainland authorities had already attained a certain level of USAR skills, whether the assistance from the FSD was needed would largely depend on the severity of the incident. Having said that, the FSD would not lower its requirement for the members of the USAR Team, and would continue to strengthen the Team's training to brush up the USAR skills of its members. Moreover, the new Fire Services Training School would provide USAR training facilities to cope with the long-term development of the FSD.

14.2 A PLG member asked whether the FSD USAR Team is a member of the United Nation's search and rescue organisation. The Department said that acquiring the membership of the UN's search and rescue organisation required the authorisation from the respective sovereign state. At the moment, Beijing already had a dedicated team participating in international rescue operations and there was no need for additional teams. In case of major incidents, all countries would keep each other informed under the existing notification mechanism. Moreover, too many support teams scrambling to reach an affected location to offer help at the same time could result in confusion.

14.3 Regarding a visit to the USAR Training Ground, the Department said that the Training Ground in Sheung Shui was a temporary one. It simulated the

environment of collapsed buildings and underground tunnels for training members of the USAR Team, and it looked like a piece of deserted land from the outside. Moreover, due to safety reasons, the underground training tunnels would not be open for public visit. Therefore, he suggested arranging for PLG members to visit USAR-related training facilities after the completion of the new Fire Services Training School. A PLG member said that he wanted to pay a visit even if the Training Ground looked like a piece of deserted land, and suggested that the visit could include a trip to the Fire Services Training School at Pat Heung. The Department said that the Department could consider the suggestion but had to coordinate with relevant units in order to make arrangements for such activities.

15. Work of the Diving Unit

15.1 A PLG member enquired in writing before the meeting about the daily routine of the Diving Unit and its future development (e.g. plans of acquiring new Fireboats or building new piers for Fireboats, etc.). The Department said that the Fire Services Diving Unit was comprised of about 150 divers who were divided into six teams. Deployed to various locations in Hong Kong, Kowloon, the New Territories and the airport, they were responsible for the search and rescue operations in Hong Kong waters. Divers had mastered deep sea diving skills and were able to work at a depth of 42 meters under water. Apart from aquatic search and rescue operations, divers were also responsible for operating and managing the compression chamber facilities and providing support to fire-fighting and rescue operations in major fires.

15.2 The Department continued that the Diving Operation and Training Support Team established in March 2013 was mainly responsible for providing support to diving operations, operating the compression chamber for treatment of patients, and conducting diving and aquatic rescue training. Apart from assisting in undertaking non-operational tasks of frontline Diving Tenders, e.g. training novices and equipping other Fire Stream staff with aquatic rescue techniques, the Team might also be deployed to the scene of major incidents to alleviate the diving workload and provide support to frontline rescue teams. The FSD would take into account the challenges brought about by the future development and changing environment of Hong Kong and train its staff accordingly in order to increase the number of reserve divers possessing diving qualifications in the Department. To enhance its rescue capabilities at sea and increase the

efficiency and effectiveness of aquatic rescue, the Department had deployed divers to Fireboats by phases in March 2013.

15.3 The Department informed the meeting that the FSD had been successfully granted funding in 2012 to replace Fireboat 7, which was built in 1990. This Fireboat mainly acted as a reserve at the moment, and it was ready for deployment whenever other Fireboats were in need of annual maintenance or repair. Currently, the FSD was conducting procurement of the new Fireboat 7 and had submitted documents to the Marine Department for further study.

15.4 A PLG member said that at the moment, the Fireboat piers were mainly located in the western waters of Hong Kong and he would like to know the arrangements for the eastern waters. The Department said that according to the Hong Kong Government's *Contingency Plan for Maritime and Aeronautical Search and Rescue*, the Director of Marine was the designated Search Director for Hong Kong's maritime search and rescue region. In case of major maritime incidents, all government departments would maintain close liaison and cooperation in rescue operations, and the resources of all departments would be put to good use in an efficient manner. At the moment, the Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF) had Marine Police bases in districts including Tai Po and Sai Kung. If an incident occurred in the eastern waters of Hong Kong, apart from deploying the closest Fireboat to the scene, the FSD would also solicit the assistance of the Marine Police when necessary. Moreover, the eastern waters of Hong Kong were not a major water channel for local vessels, and travellers around that area were mainly tourists, which meant the maritime traffic there was different from that in the comparatively busier western waters. In order to provide effective emergency rescue services, the FSD had placed a small speedboat at the pier of Pak Sha Wan in Sai Kung and staff of Sai Kung Fire Station would be deployed to operate the speedboat when necessary. Having said that, the FSD would review its maritime rescue strategies and resources from time to time to cope with the actual needs.

[Post-meeting note: During the period from July to September each year, i.e. the peak season for aquatic leisure activities, the FSD would deploy a Diving Tender to Sai Kung Fire Station and a Diving Support Speedboat to the base of Marine Police in Sai Kung on standby every Saturday, Sunday and on public holidays from 1000 to 1900 hours. The FSD was also looking for a location that was suitable for berthing Fireboats in Sai Kung waters to boost operational efficiency.]

Any Other Business

16. A PLG member asked whether the FSD had been keeping in close touch with the Hong Kong Observatory (HKO) and taken sufficient precautionary measures as the typhoons this year had been gaining strength. The Department replied that according to the Hong Kong Government's *Contingency Plan for Natural Disasters (including those arising from severe weather conditions)*, the HKO monitored weather conditions closely and initiated issue of all warnings of severe weather conditions to relevant departments to facilitate early preparation for emergency. The HKO also gave general advice on precautions to be taken by issuing messages to the public, and provided summaries of weather warnings to the media and government departments via the Information Services Department. The FSD would make arrangements according to the circumstances and the public did not need to be worried.

17. A PLG member said that should the land transport of Hong Kong Island be paralysed by "Occupy Central" in the future, fire appliances or ambulances might not be able to reach their destinations in rescue operations. He asked what the FSD would do in such cases. The Department replied that at the moment, the Hong Kong Government had an inter-departmental contingency system to tackle various emergency situations. Organisations or groups planning an assembly would normally file an application with the HKPF, which would explain to the applicant that due to safety reasons, some roads had to be kept clear for use by emergency vehicles. As in some previous major events (e.g. the Sixth World Trade Organization Ministerial Conference), the FSD would maintain close communication with relevant departments and learn about the details of the event in order to plan ahead so as to ensure that FSD members would be able to carry out their duties effectively and protect the safety of Hong Kong people.

18. A PLG member said that previously, the government had taught the general public how to identify dangerous signboards, and the Building Fire Safety Envoys did assist in completing questionnaires about signboards in buildings. However, he noticed that the government had not been promoting such messages in recent years, and he would like to know whether the government had suspended relevant arrangements. The Department said that different departments had different scopes of work. If a signboard was found to have obstructed an emergency vehicular access, the FSD would deploy its staff to the

scene to conduct inspection, while the Building Department (BD) would be responsible for matters relating to signboards in buildings. As for the questionnaires about signboards in buildings, the Department said that the FSD assisted in distributing the questionnaires to Building Fire Safety Envoys per the BD's request, and all of the questionnaires collected had already been returned to the BD for further analysis.

19. Regarding a PLG member's suggestion of organising a visit to the West Kowloon Rescue Training Centre for members of the PLG, the Department said that the FSD could consider it but had to coordinate with relevant units first.

20. A PLG member asked about the differences among "Priority One transfer", "Priority Two transfer" and "non-emergency" ambulance calls. The Department replied that ambulance calls belonging to the "Priority One transfer" category involved patients who needed to be transferred with extreme urgency from a hospital or medical institution to an acute hospital for emergency treatment or examination. "Priority Two transfer" ambulance calls were those involving patients who were required to be transported with some degree of urgency from a hospital or medical institution to an acute hospital for urgent treatment or examination, while "non-emergency" ambulance calls were handled by the Hospital Authority, which would deploy its non-emergency ambulances to provide point-to-point transfer service for mobility-handicapped patients who were unable to use public transport, old age home vehicles and Rehabus at times of admission, hospital transfer, discharge, and follow-up at specialist outpatient clinics. The FSD would not provide such services under normal circumstances.

21. There being no other business, the meeting adjourned at 7:55 p.m.

Fire Services Department
February 2014