Performance Pledge

The graded response times for calls to fires in buildings are six minutes for the built-up areas and nine to 23 minutes for areas of dispersed risks and isolated developments. For emergency ambulance services, the target response time is 12 minutes. During the period under review, the Department pledged to achieve these times in 92.5% of all calls.

In 2002, 93.94% of building fire calls and 91.76% of emergency ambulance calls were responded to within the respective response times. Correspondingly, 94.2% of building fire calls and 93.2% of emergency ambulance calls were responded to within the respective response times in 2003.

For both years, all complaints of imminent fire hazards were answered within 24 hours.

Fire-fighting

The number of fire calls fell from 41,204 in 2002 to 37,774 in 2003. During the period under review, fires claimed 50 lives and 949 injuries while 5,888 people were rescued. A total of 46 operational firemen were injured in the line of duty.

Careless handling or disposal of cigarette ends, matches and candles still contributed to the major causes of fires, totalling 2,976 and 3,160 cases in 2002 and 2003 respectively. This was followed by carelessness or accidents involving the preparation of foodstuffs and electrical faults.
Some notable fires during the period are summarised as follows:

- A No. 3 Alarm fire occurred in a domestic unit on the 10th floor of a composite building at 20 Yuet Wah Street, Kwun Tong on 3 June 2002. A large quantity of furniture and electrical appliances fuelled the fire and generated intensive heat and smoke during the fire. A resident who was stranded on the drainage pipe outside the unit was rescued by a fireman abseiling from an upper floor. Eighty other residents were led to places of safety by firemen.
• A No. 3 Alarm fire occurred at a five-storey pre-war building with suspected alterations at 22 - 24 Li Yuen Street East, Central on 15 September 2002. The fire-fighting operation was seriously obstructed by the fully bricked-up windows which had made the dispersal of smoke generated by the burning synthetic leather goods virtually impossible. In order to ventilate, several openings were made on the external walls, the roof top and a separation wall with the adjacent building.

• A restaurant under renovation on the second floor of Metropole Building in North Point was damaged by a No. 3 Alarm fire on 19 September 2002. A total of 450 people from various floors were evacuated to places of safety. Two firemen sustained injuries when putting out the fire.

• A gas explosion resulting in a No. 3 Alarm fire occurred at Flat E on the 15th floor of a domestic building in Tsui Chuk Garden, Wong Tai Sin on 30 October 2002. As a result of the explosion and fire, three residents of the affected unit and nearby units were killed and 18 firemen sustained various degree of injuries and burns. The gas leakage was found to be a deliberate act.
• A No. 3 Alarm fire broke out in a vacant cold store under renovation in Kwai Chung on 25 April 2003. Firemen took about two hours to put the fire under control. Inflammable substances were believed to be involved. A total of 36 occupants and workers were rescued and led to places of safety. Two men died and 11 people were injured in the fire.

• Two workers were killed in a No. 3 Alarm fire occurred at an industrial building in Kwai Chung on 10 May 2003. Due to the large storage of semi-finished plastic products and dangerous goods, it took about two hours to suppress the fire. Two firemen were injured in the operation and 28 people were rescued and led to places of safety.

• A fire broke out inside a unit on the seventh floor of a factory estate in Cheung Sha Wan on 27 December 2003. The fire, which claimed one life and injured 10 people, was found to have been started under suspicious circumstances.
Special Services

Special service calls cover a wide range of incidents, such as traffic accidents, people trapped-in-lifts, locked-in and locked-out of premises, gas leakages, industrial accidents, house and wall collapses, flooding, landslides and attempts to jump from a height.

A total of 40,331 special service calls were received for the two years under review, with 1,460 fatalities and 3,875 injuries recorded. Trapped or shut-in-lift cases still topped the list of incidents with 11,204 calls, followed by 2,304 cases of locked-in or out of premises and 841 cases of leakage of inflammable liquid or gas.
Firemen investigating what caused a manhole cover to fly off (The photo is supplied by The Sun; © The Sun, all rights reserved)

Firemen abseil down to stop a woman from jumping (Apple Daily photo)

Trapped lorry driver extricated from the wreck (Apple Daily photo)
Some notable incidents during the period are summarised as follows:

- On 9 December 2002, several workers fell from a collapsed scaffolding on the exterior wall of a hotel in Tsim Sha Tsui East. Some of them were stranded. A total of eight fire appliances and nine ambulances were turned out. One of the 17 rescued workers was certified dead upon arrival at hospital.

- The Department of Health asked for help on 4 May 2003 to transfer 10 crewmen with SARS symptoms from a Malaysia registered chemical tanker to shore for medical treatment. In addition to fire appliances, Fireboat Elite and five ambulance crews were turned out for providing logistical support and decontamination.
• Floodwaters swept through various parts of the northern New Territories after the relentless rain on 5 May 2003. Two police officers who were trying to rescue a man stranded in a flooded field near Lin Ma Hang Road, Ta Kwu Ling were also trapped in the water. Extensive search was carried out by the Fire Services, Police and Government Flying Service in the vicinity and along Shenzhen River. One of the police officers was swept by the flood current. He was later found but was certified dead on arrival at hospital.

• A traffic accident occurred on 10 July 2003 in which a double-decker bus fell from Tuen Mun Road and on to a hill slope of Ting Kau Village with a large number of passengers trapped inside or underneath the wreckage. Rescue operation was conducted with the assistance of the Police and Civil Aid Service. In the incident, the bus driver and 20 passengers were killed, and another 22 passengers were injured.
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- Extensive land and sea search was carried out on 26 August 2003 for a Government Flying Service helicopter which had lost contact while proceeding to pick up a patient from Cheung Chau Hospital. Wreckage of the helicopter was subsequently found scattering over a wide area on the hill slope at Pak Kung Au of the Lantau Peak. The pilot and crewman were both killed in this incident.

- On 26 September 2003, an extensive land and water search covering an area of about 1,000 m x 1,000 m at the Peak area was jointly conducted by the Fire Services, Government Flying Service and the Police for a missing two-year old child. After a four-hour search, the child was recovered by firemen at the hillside near the junction of Harlech Road and Lugard Road.

Ambulance Services

The Ambulance Command comprised 2,322 officers and ambulancemen, operating a fleet of 242 ambulances, 35 ambulance-aid motorcycles and three mobile casualty treatment centres at the end of 2003. The Command responded to 1,087,231 calls during the period under review, representing an average of 1,489 calls per day, with the highest record of 1,830 calls on 4 February 2002. A total of 985,480 patients, or a daily average of 1,350, were served.

救护车

截至二零零三年年底，救护车区共有主任级人员及救护车 2,322 名，配备 242 部救护车、35 部救护车及三部流动伤者治疗车。二零零二至零三年，救护车区处理了 1,087,231 起召唤，平均每天处理 1,489 起。其中，二零零二年二月四日一天内，处理了 1,830 起召唤，是这两年间最高单日的记录。救护车区在这两年内共处理 985,480 名伤病者，平均每天处理 1,350 名。
The Department is committed to developing paramedic ambulance services for the public. All ambulances are now equipped with automatic defibrillators and spinal immobilisation devices. By the end of 2003, 165 of them are manned by ambulancemen with Emergency Medical Assistant (EMA) II qualification during day shifts and 84 during night shifts. All 31 ambulance-aid motorcycles on run were upgraded to EMA II level.

For the full implementation of paramedic ambulance service by the first quarter of 2005, the Department appointed a team dedicated for the training of EMAs and increased manpower to release trainees from duties. Temporary alterations to the Fire Services Ambulance Command Training School at Ma On Shan were carried out to provide more training facilities. The initial training of recruits was also transferred to the Fire Services Training School to make room for paramedic training.
Based on the recommendations of a Crow Maunsell consultancy study in 2001, the Department introduced a staggered shift system in 17 selected depots in April 2003 after trials. An 'urgent care' fleet of 12 ambulances manned by two-man crews was also set up in April 2003 for the transferrals of patients between hospitals for urgent medical treatment to release more manpower for emergency ambulance attendance.

In 2003, the SARS outbreak put the Department’s operational preparedness to test. A special team was immediately set up after the outbreak to secure adequate and appropriate supply of protective gear for frontline staff. During the crisis, ambulance personnel continued to display professionalism and commitment to work at all times. They handled a total of 7,175 confirmed or suspected cases of SARS. Two crew members were believed to have infected with SARS at work.
A pilot First Responder programme was introduced in September 2003 aiming to further increase the pre-hospital survival rate of casualties and patients. First Responders are frontline fire-fighters who are trained to provide basic life support to casualties and patients before the arrival of an ambulance crew. Up to the end of 2003, 247 First Responders were trained. They attended to 406 cases and 329 casualties who were mainly suffering from cardiac arrests and breathing problems. The deployment of First Responders was extended to 13 fire stations at the end of 2003. The programme will be further expanded in phases to 64 fire stations by the end of 2004.

Mobilising and Communication

The Fire Services Communication Centre, manned round the clock, is responsible for mobilising all fire-fighting and ambulance resources and to receive complaints including those about fire hazards and dangerous goods. It also acts as an emergency co-ordinator for other Government departments and public utilities in major incidents.
To meet the projected growth of emergency calls over the next decade, a $445 million Third Generation Mobilising System (TGMS) has been under development since March 2001 to replace the current Second Generation Mobilising System. The new system will further enhance the capability and efficiency in mobilisation and communication. Cutover of the system will be in phases, which is expected to start by the second quarter of 2004.

**Airport Fire Contingent**

The primary role of the 295 strong Contingent is to provide rescue and fire-fighting services for Hong Kong International Airport. The Contingent, which comprises two fire stations and two rescue berths at strategic locations on the airport platform, is equipped with 14 fire appliances, two ambulances, two command boats and eight speed boats. In the years under review, the Contingent responded to 209 incidents involving aircraft and 1,870 ambulance calls.
Fireboats

The Marine and Off-shore Islands Division under the Hong Kong Command operates a fleet of seven fireboats and a personnel carrier. To continue to modernise the fireboat fleet, an amount of $70.75 million has been earmarked to replace Fireboat 6. The new fireboat is now under construction and is expected to be on run by late 2004. For the two-year period, fireboats responded to 112 fire and 495 special service incidents.
Diving Services

The Diving Unit has a fleet of five diving tenders, one diving support vessel and two diving support speedboats. It comprises about 150 active divers in seven teams responsible for maritime search and rescue within Hong Kong waters down to the maximum depth of 42 metres using compressed air diving equipment and underwater breaking-in tools. Five teams are deployed at strategic points throughout Hong Kong. In addition to their primary duties as operational firemen, divers are trained to deal with emergencies at sea and other underwater environments such as reservoirs, caissons, ponds and sewers. The other two teams are posted to the Airport Fire Contingent to render rapid diving rescue in aircraft ditching incidents as well as other aviation emergencies. With the specific authorisation of the Director, divers may be tasked to perform maritime search and rescue operations outside Hong Kong waters. Service divers turned out 1,150 times in the past two years.
The unit also operates a three-compartment compression chamber in Ngong Shuen Chau to treat patients suffering from decompression illness, gas poisoning and other chronic diseases that are responsive to hyperbaric oxygen treatment. For the past two years, 759 chamber operations were carried out for 67 patients.

Apart from improving skills in deep-sea diving and underwater breaking-in, enhancement training on life saving and swift water rescue were also introduced in the past two years.