

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

EEB(F)052

(Question Serial No. 1785)

Head: (49) Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Subhead (No. & title): (000) Operational expenses

Programme: (2) Environmental Hygiene and Related Services

Controlling Officer: Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (Donald NG)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Environment and Ecology

Question:

In connection with the public columbaria and crematoria in Hong Kong, please advise this Committee of:

1. the expenditure and manpower involved in each of the past 3 years;
2. the service capacity of each crematorium managed by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, as well as the actual usage figures and the utilisation rates of the facilities therein, in each of the past 3 years;
3. the number of deaths of local residents, with a breakdown by burial method (including scattering cremains at sea, scattering cremains in the Gardens of Remembrance, and interring ashes in public niches), in each of the past 3 years;
4. the latest number of applications for public niches and the average waiting time;
5. the number of new niches that have been planned and their locations (please present the information in tabular form);
6. the number of licence applications received under the Private Columbaria Ordinance, the number of cases approved and the time required for processing the applications;
7. the locations, quantity and utilisation rates of the temporary storage facilities for cremains provided by the Department.

Asked by: Hon CHAN Hak-kan (LegCo internal reference no.: 22)

Reply:

1. The overall expenditure incurred by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department as well as the manpower involved in providing cemeteries and crematoria services in the past 3 years are as follows:

Year	Expenditure (\$ million)	Manpower (Number of staff)
2022-23	558.8	177
2023-24	536.4	167
2024-25 (Revised estimate)	572.7	160

2. The number of cremation sessions released, the number of sessions booked and the utilisation rates of the 6 crematoria operated by the Department in the past 3 years are as follows:

Name of Crematorium	2022			2023			2024		
	Number of cremation sessions released	Number of cremation sessions booked	Percentage of cremation sessions booked	Number of cremation sessions released	Number of cremation sessions booked	Percentage of cremation sessions booked	Number of cremation sessions released	Number of cremation sessions booked	Percentage of cremation sessions booked
Cape Collinson	19 400	17 893	92.2%	16 607	16 498	99.3%	16 234	15 808	97.4%
Diamond Hill	11 759	11 661	99.2%	8 347	8 334	99.8%	8 842	8 827	99.8%
Fu Shan	7 643	7 591	99.3%	6 198	6 182	99.7%	6 905	6 884	99.7%
Kwai Chung	8 445	8 415	99.6%	7 908	7 885	99.7%	4 810	4 789	99.6%
Cheung Chau	1 294	125	9.7%	1 340	137	10.2%	1 302	102	7.8%
Wo Hop Shek	15 308	14 000	91.5%	13 897	13 759	99.0%	13 613	13 402	98.5%
Total:	63 849	59 685	93.5%	54 297	52 795	97.2%	51 706	49 812	96.3%

3. The number of deaths of local residents and their burial methods in the past 3 years are as follows:

Year	Number of deaths	Number of burials#	Number of cremations	Number of cases of scattering of ashes		Number of ash interment cases in public niches
				At sea	In Gardens of Remembrance*	
2022	61 557	2 957	59 685	1 012	8 437	26 473
2023	56 776	2 517	52 795	1 144	8 237	25 399
2024	52 366	2 185	49 812	1 032	8 522	23 934

Inclusive of cases in private cemeteries and permitted burial grounds.

* Inclusive of cases handled by private cemeteries.

4. The current supply of public niches is adequate. For allocation of public niches, eligible applicants may apply for the comprehensive allocation of public niches carried out once a year or the allocation of about 1 700 public niches at the Tsang Tsui Columbarium on a monthly basis. Since mid-2020, all eligible applicants have been successfully allocated with niches. In general, there is no need to wait.
5. The Government is committed to implementing the columbarium development plan. As at 31 December 2024, 7 public columbarium projects located at Diamond Hill in Wong Tai Sin, Cheung Chau, Wong Nai Chung Road in Wan Chai, Lai Chi Yuen in Mui Wo, Tsang Tsui in Tuen Mun, Wo Hop Shek Phase 1 and Cape Collinson Road in Eastern District were completed, providing around 240 000 new public niches in total. These niches have already been open for application for allocation. The smoke-free columbarium project at Shek Mun in Sha Tin under construction is expected to be completed in 2025 and will additionally provide around 40 000 niches. The Government will continue to take forward other new projects, with a view to securing a stable medium and long-term supply of public niches.
6. As at 28 February 2025, the Private Columbaria Licensing Board (PCLB) has received applications for specified instruments (i.e. licence, exemption and temporary suspension of liability) from a total of 147 private columbaria. The progress of the applications is summarised as follows:

	Licence approved	Exemption approved	Application approved in principle	Application refused/ withdrawn	Application pending decision
Number of private columbaria	13	5	77 ^{Note 1}	51	1 ^{Note 2}

Note 1: These 77 private columbaria with approval-in-principle are found to be in compliance with the relevant basic requirements for building, fire, and electrical and mechanical safety. During the validity period of their respective “approval-in-principle”, the applicants are required to take actions in order to fulfil all requirements for a licence/an exemption.

Note 2: PCLB has made certain decisions (including giving approval/approval-in-principle to or refusing the applications) on all applications for specified instruments in respect of pre-cut-off columbaria. A “pre-cut-off columbarium” refers to a columbarium that was in operation, and in which ashes were interred in niches, immediately before 8:00 a.m. on 18 June 2014. The above 1 columbarium pending decision is a post-cut-off columbarium.

The time PCLB takes to process a licence application depends on the actual circumstances of the case, particularly on whether the private columbarium has complied with all the requirements relating to licence application stipulated in the Private Columbaria Ordinance and those specified by PCLB (such as the requirements relating to planning, land, buildings, fire safety, electrical and mechanical safety, management plan, right to use the premises, environmental protection, etc.), as well as whether the applicant has submitted the required documents and information to respond to the comments of the relevant departments and prove that the private columbarium has complied with those requirements.

- At present, the Department provides some 77 000 temporary storage spaces for cremains at Kwai Chung Crematorium, Wo Hop Shek Columbarium Phases III, V and VI, Cape Collinson Columbarium, Fu Shan Columbarium and Hong Kong Cemetery. The temporary storage spaces at Kwai Chung Crematorium and Wo Hop Shek Columbarium Phase III have been opened for public use. The number of temporary storage spaces for cremains at these 2 facilities as well as their utilisation rates are as follows:

	Kwai Chung Crematorium (For storage of cremains bags)	Wo Hop Shek Columbarium Phase III (For storage of cinerary urns)
Capacity for temporary storage of cremains	10 080 spaces	5 040 spaces
Number of spaces occupied as at 28 February 2025	283	372
Utilisation rate	2.8%	7.4%