

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

EEB(F)130

(Question Serial No. 1494)

Head: (49) Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not specified

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:

Regarding the work of the Joint Office for Investigation of Water Seepage Complaints (JO), please advise this Committee of:

1. the current manpower, staffing establishment, ranks, salary expenditure by rank and total salary expenditure of the JO;
2. the following statistics on water seepage cases in buildings handled by JO in each of the past 5 years:
 - i. reports received;
 - ii. cases handled;
 - iii. cases with the source of water seepage successfully identified and investigation completed;
 - iv. cases with the source of water seepage not identified but investigation terminated;
 - v. cases under investigation;
 - vi. cases with investigation not completed within 90 working days;
 - vii. Nuisance Notices issued;
 - viii. applications for Nuisance Orders made to and approved by the court;
 - ix. applications for warrants to effect entry into premises made to and approved by the court;
 - x. cases of prosecution and conviction; and
3. the number of technological projects introduced and upgraded by the JO for enhancing the effectiveness of its investigation and monitoring, as well as the details and expenditure of these projects in each of the past 5 years.

Asked by: Hon YUNG Hoi-yan (LegCo internal reference no.: 25)

Reply:

1. The staffing establishment and expenditure of the Joint Office (JO), which is set up by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) and the Buildings Department (BD) for the investigation of water seepage cases in buildings, in 2024-25 are as follows:

FEHD	
Number of investigation and coordinating staff ¹	252
Staff costs and departmental expenses ² (\$ million)	205.8 (Revised estimate)
BD	
Number of professional and technical staff	102
Staff costs and departmental expenses ² (\$ million)	87.2 (Revised estimate)
Expenditure for engaging outsourced consultants (\$ million)	49.0 (Revised estimate)

Note 1: Including Senior Superintendents, Superintendents, Chief Health Inspectors, Senior Health Inspectors and Health Inspectors, as well as Environmental Nuisance Investigators and Administrative Assistants who are Non-Civil Service Contract staff.

Note 2: JO does not maintain a breakdown of the relevant salary expenditure.

2. Statistics on water seepage cases in buildings received and handled by JO in each of the past 5 years are as follows:

	Number of cases	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
(i)	Cases received	39 166	43 233	39 555	45 033	47 299
(ii)	Total number of cases handled ¹	35 397	36 262	38 275	43 367	46 907
(iii)	Cases with source of water seepage identified ¹	6 746	6 000	5 186	5 669	5 080
(iv)	Cases with source of water seepage not identified and water seepage continued ¹	3 403	4 467	4 384	5 495	4 874
(vii)	Nuisance Notices issued under the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132) ¹	5 926	5 281	4 587	5 794	5 058

	Number of cases	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024
(viii)	Nuisance Orders issued by the court ¹	72	100	60	54	38
(ix)	Warrants to Effect Entry into Premises applied to the court during investigation ^{1,4}	67	87	45	67	23
(x)	Cases with prosecution instituted ^{1,2}	225	216	146	174	163
	Conviction cases ^{1,3}	163	260	158	150	114

Note 1: The number of cases does not necessarily correspond to the number of cases received in the same year. Some of them are received before that year.

Note 2: Including prosecution cases for non-compliance with Nuisance Notices and Nuisance Orders.

Note 3: Including conviction cases for non-compliance with Nuisance Notices and Nuisance Orders.

Note 4: The court issued Warrants to Effect Entry into Premises for all the applications.

(v) As at 31 December 2024, among the cases received, the number of cases yet to be completed was 10 653.

(vi) Since January 2022, JO has published on its thematic webpage on water seepage (www.waterseepage.gov.hk) the actual performance in carrying out investigations to reports on water seepage in buildings each year, i.e. the percentage of cases with investigations completed and informant notified of the results within 90 days. In 2020, 2021, 2022 and 2023, the relevant percentages were 67, 70, 68.5 and 65.4 respectively, and the percentages of cases with investigations not completed and informant not notified of the results within 90 working days were 33, 30, 31.5 and 34.6 respectively. The actual performance of JO each year is usually announced in the third quarter of the following year. At present, the actual performance in 2024 is pending calculation.

- Since June 2018, JO has applied new testing technologies, such as infrared thermography and microwave tomography, in professional investigation in selected pilot districts where applicable. With the experience gained and data obtained in the pilot application, JO has extended the use of these technologies to a total of 16 districts as at December 2024. Nevertheless, under special circumstances, such as small seepage area, spalling of ceiling concrete affected by water seepage or blockage by tile finishes or other facilities (including suspended ceiling or pipes, etc.) on the ceiling, where the new technologies cannot be applied effectively, the outsourced consultants have to continue to employ the conventional methods.

JO will continue to use the new testing technologies effectively to identify the source of water seepage. Depending on the availability of relevant service providers in the market, JO will gradually extend the use of these technologies to the remaining districts. It will review the resource and manpower arrangements in a timely manner, and deploy them flexibly to meet actual operational needs. Meanwhile, with the assistance of outsourced consultants, BD's professional and technical staff in JO are responsible for carrying out professional investigation using new testing technologies. As this is part of their overall duties in handling water seepage reports, BD cannot provide a separate breakdown of the expenditure for conducting water seepage investigation using new testing technologies.

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