

**CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY**

**EEB(F)102**

**(Question Serial No. 2699)**

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:

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

1. of the staff establishment, operational expenditure and salary expenditure of JO in the past 5 years and the estimated figures in 2026-27;
2. of the number of cases of JO in each of the past 5 years, with a breakdown by:
  - I. reported case;
  - II. reported case handled;
  - III. case in which consultant is engaged to carry out investigation;
  - IV. case with the source of water seepage successfully identified and investigation completed;
  - V. case with the source of water seepage not identified but investigation terminated;
  - VI. case with investigation not completed within 90 working days;
  - VII. Nuisance Notice issued;
  - VIII. application for Nuisance Order made to and approved by the court;
  - IX. application for warrants to effect entry into premises made to and approved by the court;
  - X. case of prosecution and conviction;
3. of the respective costs of JO for handling the above-mentioned cases in the past 5 years; and
4. whether JO will consider introducing more advanced technologies in the future to enhance the effectiveness of its investigation and monitoring. If yes, what are the details? If no, what is/are the reason(s)?

Asked by: Hon LEE Chun-keung (LegCo internal reference no.: 12)

Reply:

1. The staff 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 each of the past 4 years and the estimated figures in 2026-27 are as follows:

	2022-23	2023-24	2024-25	2025-26	2026-27
<b>FEHD</b>					
Number of investigation and coordinating staff	252	252	252	252	252
Staff costs and departmental expenses <sup>Note</sup> (\$ million)	192.1	200.2	203.2	215.5 (Revised estimate)	225.2 (Estimate)
<b>BD</b>					
Number of professional and technical staff	82	102	102	102	102
Staff costs and departmental expenses <sup>Note</sup> (\$ million)	66.8	78.1	87.1	92.0 (Revised estimate)	92.0 (Estimate)
Expenditure for engaging outsourced consultants (\$ million)	38.4	45.0	49.7	56.0 (Revised estimate)	48.0 (Estimate)

Note: JO does not keep a breakdown of the relevant operational expenditure and 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:

	Item	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
I	Cases received	43 233	39 555	45 033	47 299	45 957
II	Total number of cases handled <sup>Note 1</sup>	36 262	38 275	43 367	46 907	44 548
III	Cases in which consultants have been engaged to carry out investigation (i.e. Stage III professional investigation) <sup>Notes 1, 2</sup>	12 860	11 787	12 643	13 850	13 121
IV	Cases with source of water seepage identified	6 000	5 186	5 669	5 080	5 326
V	Cases with source of water seepage not identified and investigation terminated	4 467	4 384	5 495	4 874	5 155
VII	Nuisance Notices issued under the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132) <sup>Note 1</sup>	5 281	4 587	5 794	5 058	4 625
VIII	Nuisance Orders issued by the court <sup>Notes 1, 3</sup>	100	60	54	38	11
IX	Warrants to Effect Entry into Premises applied to the court during investigation <sup>Notes 1, 4</sup>	87	45	67	23	21
X	Cases with prosecution instituted <sup>Notes 1, 5</sup>	216	146	174	163	153

	<b>Item</b>	<b>2021</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>	<b>2025</b>
	Cases with conviction secured <sup>Notes 1, 6</sup>	260	158	150	114	123

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: In some of the handled cases mentioned in (II), the source of water seepage may have been identified in Stage II initial investigation or the seepage ceased during investigation. Therefore, not all handled cases would proceed to Stage III professional investigation.

Note 3: The court issued Nuisance Orders for all the applications.

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

Note 5: Including prosecution cases for non-compliance with Nuisance Notices and Nuisance Orders.

Note 6: Including conviction cases for non-compliance with Nuisance Notices and Nuisance Orders.

2. VI Since January 2022, JO has published on its thematic webpage on water seepage ([www.waterseepage.gov.hk](http://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 2021, 2022, 2023 and 2024, the relevant percentages were 70, 68.5, 65.4 and 68 respectively, and the percentages of cases with investigations not completed and informant not notified of the results within 90 working days were 30, 31.5, 34.6 and 32 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 2025 is pending calculation.
3. The manpower and expenditure involved in each water seepage case handled by JO vary, depending on factors such as the complexity of the case (e.g. whether the case involves multiple sources of water seepage or intermittent water seepage) and the amount of investigation work required (e.g. whether there is a need for Stage II or Stage III investigation). Besides, for cases requiring the engagement of consultants, appropriate arrangements have to be made according to actual circumstances (e.g. the interior renovations of the premises affected by water seepage) to decide the mode of professional investigation. Therefore, the cost of each case varies. JO does not keep a breakdown of the expenditure for handling different cases.
4. To identify the source of water seepage more effectively, since June 2018, JO has applied inspection and testing technologies, including microwave tomography and infrared thermography, in professional investigation in selected pilot districts where applicable. Based on the experience gained and data obtained in the pilot application, JO has extended the use of such technologies to all districts across the territory since June 2025. JO will continue to closely monitor the latest developments and applications of the technologies and equipment used for water seepage investigations with a view to further enhancing the inspection and testing methods and their effectiveness.

JO will roll out a pilot scheme in 2026-27 in all districts across the territory to enhance the inspection and testing procedures for handling water seepage problems in buildings.

Infrared thermography will be added in Stage I investigation to expedite the identification of the source of water seepage. If it is shown that the moisture content is higher than the specified level and there is reason to believe that water seepage is caused by the upper unit, a Notification Letter will be issued to the owner of the upper unit immediately, requesting inspection and repair on his part within a specified time frame. If water seepage persists after the deadline, JO will conduct investigation and may recover the costs of the tests done during the investigation from the owner after confirming the source of water seepage. The scheme aims to urge the owner of the upper unit causing the water seepage to carry out inspection and repair in a responsive manner so that the problem can be resolved promptly. At the same time, to streamline the procedures and increase efficiency, JO will carry out Stage II initial investigation and Stage III professional investigation in parallel for all applicable cases.

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