

Ombudsman probes maintenance and repair of playgrounds in public rental housing estates (with photo)

The following is issued on behalf of the Office of The Ombudsman:

The Ombudsman, Ms Winnie Chiu, today (May 21) announced a direct investigation to examine the maintenance and repair of playgrounds in public rental housing (PRH) estates to identify any areas for improvement.

There were over 4 500 playground facilities in the PRH estates managed by the Hong Kong Housing Authority (HA) as at January 2019. In recent years, there have been reports about many play/fitness facilities in PRH estates being in a state of disrepair. There has also been a delay in repairing some facilities, rendering them unavailable to PRH residents for a prolonged period. Many people also find the design of playground facilities in PRH estates to be outdated and uninspired, falling short of meeting the public's demand for engaging outdoor leisure and fitness equipment.

Currently, most playgrounds in PRH estates use multi-play equipment and movable parts to provide recreational/fitness options. Under the HA's policy, such facilities must be installed and repaired by the agents on the Housing Authority Play/Fitness Equipment Agents Reference List (the List). For day-to-day management matters, the Housing Department (HD) conducts routine inspections of the facilities in PRH estates. Under the existing mechanism, the HD will notify works staff and the agents concerned of any damages found so that staff can carry out inspections and repairs. In case any facilities need replacement, the HD will request the agents on the List to provide information and suggestions on available products for the consideration of the relevant Estate Management Advisory Committee and then invite tenders.

"In Hong Kong, PRH estates accommodate a large number of residents, and the playground facilities in those estates serve as the major outdoor pleasure area for the residents in the neighbourhood. Hence, the provision and safety of these facilities are crucial. This direct investigation will examine the mechanism for the maintenance and repair of playground facilities in PRH estates, which includes the HD's procedures for routine inspections and the HA's monitoring of agents' performance. Playground facilities to be examined include both play equipment in children's playgrounds and fitness equipment. We intend to explore ways to improve the standards of playgrounds in PRH estates in general," Ms Chiu said.

The Ombudsman now invites members of the public to provide their views on the above topic in writing to the Office of The Ombudsman by June 21, 2020:

Address: 30/F, China Merchants Tower, Shun Tak Centre

168-200 Connaught Road Central, Hong Kong
Fax: 2882 8149
Email: complaints@ombudsman.hk



Ombudsman probes Government handling of misconnection of private building sewers to stormwater drains

The following is issued on behalf of the Office of The Ombudsman:

The Ombudsman, Ms Winnie Chiu, declared a direct investigation today (May 21) to examine whether the Government has properly handled problems related to the misconnection of private building sewers to stormwater drains.

According to information from the Environmental Protection Department (EPD), the misconnection of private building sewers to stormwater drains, which leads to the discharge of untreated sewage into the sea, is one of the major causes of the pollution that degrades the quality of coastal waters in Hong Kong. There are also media reports from time to time about cases of sewage discharged from private buildings into the sea through stormwater drainage systems in certain districts. This has resulted in unpleasant odours at the waterfront causing a prolonged nuisance to residents and passers-by in the vicinity.

For handling the misconnection of private building sewers to stormwater drains, the division of responsibilities of respective government departments are as follows. On receipt of a relevant complaint, the EPD will look into the matter from the perspective of environmental protection, and will institute prosecution against illegal sewage dischargers pursuant to the Water Pollution Control Ordinance. The EPD is also responsible for the co-ordination and planning of installation of "dry weather flow interceptors" in

various districts to help alleviate the impact on coastal water quality caused by sewage entering the stormwater drainage system during dry seasons. The Buildings Department (BD) will conduct an investigation from a building structural safety point of view and issue statutory orders to the property owners concerned under the Buildings Ordinance to demand rectification of misconnected pipes and prosecute those not in compliance with the orders. The Drainage Services Department (DSD), with a supportive role to play, is responsible for the detection of misconnection cases during its routine inspections. The DSD is also responsible for the construction and operation of the "dry weather flow interceptors". This direct investigation aims at examining the effectiveness of work done by the three departments in handling cases of misconnection of private building sewers to stormwater drains, especially in their performance at the location of the misconnection as well as the departments' pursuit of liability and implementation of remedial measures.

Ms Chiu said, "Proper maintenance of private buildings, including ensuring correct connections of pipes, is a duty incumbent upon property owners. However, the sewage pipes of some private premises and communal sewers of some private buildings have been misconnected to the stormwater drainage system for various reasons, leading to the discharge of untreated sewage into the sea. Our preliminary inquiry has revealed a number of cases dragging on for years without resolution. As long as the misconnected sewers remain unrectified, a huge volume of effluent will continue to flow into the sea and cause pollution day after day. Such a situation is highly unsatisfactory. I have, therefore, decided to initiate this direct investigation to examine whether the EPD, BD and DSD have appropriately handled this issue. I will be making recommendations for improvement where necessary."

The Ombudsman is inviting views from members of the public on this topic. Written submissions should reach the Office of The Ombudsman by June 21, 2020:

Address: 30/F, China Merchants Tower, Shun Tak Centre
168-200 Connaught Road Central, Hong Kong

Fax: 2882 8149

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Establishments reminded to return questionnaire for Annual Survey of Economic Activities

The Census and Statistics Department today (May 21) reminded the

management of the establishments selected in the 2019 round of the Annual Survey of Economic Activities to return the completed questionnaires to the department on or before May 29, 2020. The questionnaires were mailed earlier this year to about 20 000 selected establishments.

The survey aims to collect up-to-date statistical data from the selected establishments, so as to compile statistics on business performance and operating characteristics of various economic sectors for evaluating their contribution to Hong Kong's Gross Domestic Product. The survey results are useful to both the Government and the private sector in formulating policies and making decisions.

The Annual Survey of Economic Activities is a mandatory survey conducted under Part III of the Census and Statistics Ordinance (Chapter 316). According to section 13(1) of the Ordinance, any person to whom a questionnaire relating to a statistical survey is delivered shall complete the questionnaire or cause it to be completed by other persons to the best of his or her knowledge and belief, and in the manner specified in the questionnaire, and then return the questionnaire on or before the specified date. The Ordinance also stipulates that all collected data which may enable identification of individual establishments should be kept in strict confidence and should not be released to any unauthorised parties including government departments. Such data will be used for compiling statistics which will not enable information relating to individual establishments to be revealed.

The department would like to thank the establishments which have already returned the questionnaires, and appeal for the co-operation of other establishments which have been selected in the current survey by returning the completed questionnaires to the department on or before May 29. Any respondent who is unable to return the completed questionnaire of the above survey on or before May 29 is required to indicate the reason(s) for such delay and a reasonable date by which the completed questionnaire will be returned to the department.

The questionnaire has been designed so that respondents can complete it themselves by following the relevant explanatory notes. If necessary, officers of the department will contact individual establishments to offer assistance in completing the questionnaire. These officers will each carry a Government/Enumerator Identity Card and a certificate for conducting the survey, which are available for inspection.

The department also pointed out that audited accounts are not essential for the supply of income and expenditure data required for the survey. The department accepts figures based on preliminary accounts or estimates which are correct to the best of the respondents' knowledge at the time of submitting the questionnaires.

HAD's Emergency Co-ordination Centre stood down

Attention duty announcers, radio and TV stations:

Please broadcast the following as soon as possible and repeat it at suitable intervals:

As the Red Rainstorm Warning Signal has been cancelled, the Home Affairs Department's Emergency Co-ordination Centre and the emergency hotline 2572 8427 have ceased to operate.

HAD's Emergency Co-ordination Centre in operation

Attention duty announcers, radio and TV stations:

Please broadcast the following as soon as possible and repeat it at suitable intervals:

As the Red Rainstorm Warning Signal has been issued, the Home Affairs Department's Emergency Co-ordination Centre is now in operation.

The Home Affairs Department will open temporary shelters for people in need of temporary accommodation.

For details, please contact the centre on 2572 8427.