

Government and Working Group assist dine-in catering premises in improving air change or installing air purifiers with multi-pronged approach

The Secretary for Food and Health has earlier stipulated a requirement on air change or air purifiers to be complied with in dine-in catering premises in the directions in relation to the catering business under the Prevention and Control of Disease (Requirements and Directions) (Business and Premises) Regulation (Cap. 599F) (the Regulation). The Working Group, established for the smooth implementation of the requirement, together with various government departments have been adopting a multi-pronged approach in assisting catering premises operators and ventilation works contractors to smoothly implement the requirement, so as to protect the health of staff, customers and the public and to fortify the public's confidence in patronising catering premises.

In support of the goal of completing the registration by catering premises operators by April 30, the Working Group convened its third meeting yesterday (April 19) to review the work progress over the past month and discuss the specific work for the next stage. On assisting catering premises operators and specialist contractors (ventilation works category), the progress made by the Working Group and relevant government departments was as follows:

- (a) an online platform, with a link to the webpage of the Buildings Department (www.bd.gov.hk/en/resources/online-tools/registers-search/registrationsearch.html) containing the list of 180 specialist contractors (ventilation works category), was launched by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) on March 18 for registration in respect of catering premises;
- (b) meetings were held with trade representatives from the trades of catering premises, specialist contractors (ventilation works category), electrical appliance suppliers and the hotels;
- (c) a list of air purifiers meeting the specified specifications was announced and uploaded to the FEHD's website on April 1. The composite list (www.fehd.gov.hk/english/licensing/guide_general_reference/Information_air-changes_purification.html) has been updated in response to the supplementary information made by the submitters from time to time. As at April 19, a total of 305 air purifiers met the specified specifications; and
- (d) A Guide on Compliance with the Requirement on Air Change/Air Purifiers in Seating Areas of Dine-in Catering Premises (www.fehd.gov.hk/english/licensing/guide_general_reference/guide_on_compliance_with_requirement_on_air_change.html) was promulgated on April 11 with a

video uploaded to the FEHD's website

(www.fehd.gov.hk/english/licensing/guide_general_reference/Reference_Video_for_ACH-Air_purifier.mp4) to enable the trade to master the essential points on specific technical details and facilitate expeditious follow-up arrangements for the prompt implementation of the relevant ventilation requirement.

At yesterday's meeting, the Working Group and relevant government departments agreed on the follow-up work below as the plan for the next stage:

(a) continue to enhance publicity and education with a view to assisting the trade in grasping the key concepts and relevant follow-up arrangements regarding enhancement of air change of premises and installation of air purifiers;

(b) organise a webinar for direct communication between catering business operators and specialist contractors (ventilation works category);

(c) according to information obtained by the Working Group, there is a stock of around 36 000 air purifiers of which the models meet the specified specifications available in the market. Yet individual demand and supply may be subject to commercial considerations; and

(d) continue to meet with representatives of the trades and the stakeholders.

The Working Group and relevant government departments today (April 20) visited a number of catering premises (including a bar, a Chinese restaurant, a Hong Kong-style tea restaurant and a hotel restaurant) to learn more about their successful examples and experiences of difficulties faced. A video of the experience sharing will be uploaded to the FEHD's webpage later with a view to assisting other cases in finding appropriate solutions.

A Government spokesman said, "To comply with the requirements on air change or air purifiers in catering premises under the Regulation, catering premises operators are required to register with the FEHD on or before April 30 that the air change per hour at seating areas of their premises has reached six, or air purifiers that meet the specified specifications have been installed according to the on-the-ground situation, together with a certificate issued by a registered specialist contractor (ventilation works category). As at April 19, 1 317 catering premises have submitted online registrations and another 129 have submitted online declarations before March 18 through the voluntary declaration scheme.

"Catering premises must submit an application of extension to the FEHD if they are unable to complete the registration on time. The FEHD will consider each case based on individual circumstances. Individual catering premises operators, after having taken reasonably practicable steps in an attempt to meet the relevant requirement, do not have to be overly worried and they may, if necessary, download the form from the FEHD's website (www.fehd.gov.hk/english/licensing/guide_general_reference/Application_for_extension_of_time_for_registration_on_air_change_installation_of_air_purifier_in_catering_premises.html) and submit the application in accordance with the

instructions on the website. If the application is approved, the catering premises must complete the registration within the deadline specified by the FEHD. During the initial stage of the implementation of the new requirement, the department will focus on publicity and education as well as providing advices, and will closely monitor the relevant situation and adjust the arrangements in due course," the spokesman added.

The Chairman of the Working Group, Professor Yuen Pak-leung, said, "Our common goal is to restore to normality in a gradual and orderly manner under the premise of upholding the anti-epidemic principles. Working together to implement relevant ventilation requirement as soon as possible can protect the health of staff, customers and the public, and fortify the public's confidence in patronising catering premises. We hope to be able to refrain from using a 'stop and go' approach on the catering industry, in face of the epidemic situation in future."

Regarding the requirement stipulated under the Regulation that the air change per hour (ACH) at seating areas of dine-in catering premises must reach at least six, the Government spokesman stressed that although there is currently no uniform standard across the world on ventilation requirements for catering premises in response to prevention of COVID-19 transmission, it is generally agreed that improving ventilation measures could assist in infection control. With reference to various materials around the world, including ventilation standards applicable to non-residential buildings, relevant scientific and clinical research, and information provided by the Chartered Institution of Building Services Engineers of the United Kingdom and others on design guidelines for ventilation systems at public venues (including catering premises), the Government, after balancing relevant factors including effectiveness of the measures and the affordability of the trade, took on board in last October the ACH at seating areas of catering premises at six as the threshold for the voluntary declaration system, which has been codified into the mandatory registration system this March. The ACH at six is equivalent to 27 cubic metres per hour per person, which is higher than 17 cubic m per hour per person as stipulated under the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132).