

## LCQ8: Members of public engaging in outdoor activities under inclement weather

Following is a question by the Hon Steven Ho and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr Tang Ping-keung, in the Legislative Council today (October 30):

Question:

It has been reported that whenever a typhoon hits Hong Kong, some members of the public will recklessly disregard warnings and purposely go to the seaside to "chase wind", and some people will even engage in outdoor activities such as hiking and surfing under extreme weather. There are views pointing out that such behaviour not only endangers their own lives and safety, but also wastes the Government's rescue resources and leads to casualties among rescuers. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the following information on cases received by the Government in each of the past five years where members of the public encountered danger and sought assistance while engaging in outdoor activities when weather warnings were in force: the number of such cases, the types of outdoor activities involved, the number of search and rescue (S&R) personnel, the casualties among the S&R personnel, and the public expenditure involved;

(2) given that the existing legislation empowers the authorities to close beaches or country parks when necessary, and it is an offence to enter such closed beaches or country parks without permission, of the number of prosecutions instituted by the authorities in the past three years in respect of the aforesaid offence;

(3) of the work undertaken by the Government in the past three years to prohibit members of the public from entering dangerous areas such as waterfronts, riversides and hills when weather warnings were in force (including putting up notices and disseminating warning messages through the media), as well as the expenditure involved (with a breakdown by work initiative); and

(4) whether it has considered imposing charges on those members of the public who encounter danger and seek assistance as a result of riskily engaging in outdoor activities under inclement weather (e.g. requiring them to bear a certain proportion of the S&R expenditure), so as to achieve a deterrent effect; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

The Government strongly discourages the public from taking risks to engage in outdoor activities under inclement weather. It will continue to remind members of the public through various channels of the risks of engaging in outdoor activities under inclement weather, and step up enforcement actions. Under extreme weather conditions, such as when the Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 8 or above, or the Black Rainstorm Warning are in force, mountain-climbing or other water sports activities will become even more dangerous. In case of an accident, it will also put rescuers in a dangerous situation.

In consultation with the Culture, Sports and Tourism Bureau and the Environment and Ecology Bureau, our consolidated reply to the question raised by the Hon Steven Ho is as follows:

(1) Between January 1, 2020 and September 30, 2024, the Fire Services Department (FSD), the Hong Kong Police Force (HKPF), and the Government Flying Service have been deployed for mountain rescue arising from camping or hiking and immersion incidents arising from swimming or surfing when an Amber, Red or Black Rainstorm Warning, or Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 3 or above was in force. Details are as follows:

Year	Number of mountain rescue incidents	Staff deployed	Number of immersion incidents	Staff deployed
2020	1	22	2	32
2021	5	58	2	38
2022	10	71	1	33
2023	23	352	16	334
2024 (as at September 30)	21	146	3	72

The above deployments did not result in any casualties among the rescuers. The rescue teams have not maintained a statistical breakdown of the operating cost.

(2) As far as temporary closure of beaches is concerned, the Leisure and Cultural Services Department (LCSD) has, in addition to giving advice on multiple occasions, issued a total of four verbal warnings in the past three years to persons entering/intending to enter temporarily closed beaches for water sports activities. During the period, no prosecution was instituted against non-compliance with the temporary closure of beaches.

As regards the hoisting of red flags at unclosed beaches, the LCSD has, in addition to giving advice on multiple occasions, successfully instituted

one prosecution against water sports activities illegally conducted within the area of gazetted beaches in the past three years. Furthermore, during the law enforcement operation at Big Wave Bay Beach on October 25, 2024, two members of the public were found to have committed the acts of illegal surfing during hoisting of red flags at the unclosed beach, suspected of contravening the Bathing Beaches Regulation. An investigation by the LCSD is underway into such a case and prosecution is under consideration.

On the other hand, in the past three years, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) had not closed country parks due to inclement weather. The AFCD will consider the closure of country parks having regard to the actual situation and when necessary.

(3) During temporary closure of beaches and hoisting of red flags at unclosed beaches, beach staff will advise or verbally warn members of the public who are oblivious to the dangers at sea for their action jeopardising their own safety and that of rescuers. The LCSD will also consider instituting prosecutions against wrongdoers to serve as deterrence. Generally, members of the public heed the advice from the staff in virtually all cases. The above work does not involve additional expenditure.

When adverse weather warnings (such as Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal No. 3 or Rain Storming Warnings) are about to be issued or while these are in force, the AFCD will appeal to members of the public to refrain from going to the country parks through news broadcasts and social media platforms. Moreover, the AFCD will regularly utilise the social media and other communication channels to promote hiking safety, and remind members of the public to avoid visiting country parks during adverse weather. The above work forms part of the AFCD management of country parks, and therefore does not involve additional expenditure.

Whenever a Tropical Cyclone Warning Signal is in force, the Hong Kong Observatory (HKO) will remind the public to stay away from the shoreline and refrain from conducting any water sports activities. When a Rainstorm Warning Signal is in force, the HKO will remind the public to stay away from watercourses, and to stay alert to the possible dangers of flooding of the watercourses even after the Rainstorm Warning is cancelled. Other weather warnings or alerts are also accompanied by corresponding points to note. The HKO currently disseminates the above information to the public through various channels, including the HKO's website, the mobile application MyObservatory, and social media platforms. The relevant operation and maintenance expenses have been subsumed into the recurrent cost of the HKO which cannot be further broken down.

(4) The Government has always accorded top priority to public safety and the protection of people's life and property. When calls for various emergencies are received, the HKPF and the FSD will immediately assess the nature of each incident and deploy appropriate resources to the scene.

The Government strongly discourages the public from taking risks to perform outdoor activities under inclement weather, as these activities will

bring significant risks not only to the members of the public themselves, but also to the rescue personnel deployed in case of emergency. Notwithstanding the above, people's lives are a top priority, and the Government will provide effective, reliable and efficient emergency services to people in distress or in need under all circumstances. The last thing we want to see is those in need being deterred from seeking emergency call services due to any reasons, including the charging of a levy.