

**CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY**

**FHB(FE)090**

**(Question Serial No. 2872)**

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 (Miss Vivian LAU)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Food and Health

Question:

With regard to public niches, please provide information on the following:

1. the number of deaths (Hong Kong residents) and the means of disposal of the dead by burial and cremation in the past 3 years;
2. the number of applications for public niches in Hong Kong, the number of niches allocated, the total number of applications on the waiting list for public niches and the average waiting time for a public niche in the past 3 years; and
3. details of the Department's efforts to promote the scattering of cremains at sea or in Gardens of Remembrance this year, as well as the number of cases involving scattering of cremains at sea and in Gardens of Remembrance handled by the Department in the past 3 years; whether the Department has formulated indicators for the said promotional efforts (if yes, the details; if not, the reason(s)).

Asked by: Hon CHAN Chi-chuen (Member Question No. 30)

Reply:

1. The information sought is provided as follows -

| <b>Year</b> | <b>No. of Deaths</b> | <b>No. of Burials</b> | <b>No. of Cremations</b> |
|-------------|----------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| 2014        | 45 710               | 3 477                 | 41 244                   |
| 2015        | 46 757               | 3 355                 | 42 737                   |
| 2016        | 46 662               | 3 253                 | 43 556                   |

2. New niches are allocated by computer balloting. Waiting list applies only to the allocation of niches returned to the Department.

The information sought on allocation of new niches is as follows -

| Year | New niches          |                         |
|------|---------------------|-------------------------|
|      | No. of applications | No. of niches allocated |
| 2014 | 16 321              | 12 053                  |
| 2015 | 11 627              | 14 573                  |
| 2016 | 178                 | 5 239                   |

Note: The year in which new niches are allocated may not be the same as that in which the applications are made.

In the past 3 years, on average about 270 niches per annum are returned to the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (the Department). These niches are re-allocated according to the priority in the waiting list of the respective columbarium. The information sought is provided as follows -

| Year | Re-allocated niches |                            |   |                               |
|------|---------------------|----------------------------|---|-------------------------------|
|      | No. of applications | No. of niches re-allocated | No. of applications on the waiting list | Average waiting time (months) |
| 2014 | 5 554               | 193                        | 23 235                                  | 54                            |
| 2015 | 7 164               | 394                        | 21 048                                  | 45                            |
| 2016 | 6 923               | 271                        | 24 280                                  | 42                            |

Note: The average waiting time is dependent on the number of niches that are returned to the Department for re-allocation.

3. In 2017-18, the Department will continue with its efforts in promoting green burial. Plans are in hand to sustain publicity and public education through different channels, including Announcement in the Public Interest on television and radio, promotional videos, posters and banners, a mobile app, collaboration with non-governmental organisations and promotional activities at Senior Exhibition, etc.

The number of cases handled by the Government where cremated human ashes were scattered at sea or in Gardens of Remembrance in the past 3 years is as follows -

| <b>Year</b> | <b>Number of cases</b> | <b>Scattering of ashes</b> |                                  |              |
|-------------|------------------------|----------------------------|----------------------------------|--------------|
|             |                        | <b>At sea</b>              | <b>In Gardens of Remembrance</b> | <b>Total</b> |
| 2014        | 856                    | 2 697                      | 3 553                            |              |
| 2015        | 877                    | 3 196                      | 4 073                            |              |
| 2016        | 900                    | 4 004                      | 4 904                            |              |

While the total number of cases where ashes are scattered at sea or in Gardens of Remembrance has increased by 38% from 2014 to 2016, it takes time for the community at large to accept green burial as a sustainable form of handling cremated human ashes. We will continue to improve the green burial facilities and services while stepping up our promotion efforts.

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