

**CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY**

**FHB(FE)271**

**(Question Serial No. 4280)**

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 the columbaria services of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (the Department), please advise this Committee on the following:

- (a) the number of new niches available for interment of ashes of the deceased in the columbaria under the Department in 2017-18, with a breakdown by columbarium;
- (b) the number of cases currently on the waiting list for niches managed by the Department; the number of new applications for niches managed by the Department and the number of niches allocated by the Department in each of the past 3 years;
- (c) the average waiting time for interment of ashes in niches managed by the Department after cremations of the deceased in each of the past 3 years;
- (d) the number of niches vacated for re-allocation each year after the relaxation of the cap on the number of sets of ashes that may be stored in a niche; and
- (e) whether a work plan will be formulated to promote the placing of additional sets of ashes in a niche in 2017-18; if yes, the details and estimated expenditure of the plan concerned; if not, the reason(s).

Asked by: Hon CHAN Tanya (Member Question No. 238)

Reply:

- (a) In 2017-18, the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (the Department) will not have new niches for allocation to members of the public.
- (b) 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 -

<b>Year</b>	<b>New niches</b>	
	<b>No. of applications</b>	<b>No. of niches allocated</b>
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 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 -

<b>Year</b>	<b>Re-allocated niches</b>	
	<b>No. of applications</b>	<b>No. of niches re-allocated</b>
2014	5 554	193
2015	7 164	394
2016	6 923	271

- (c) There is no statistic on the average time from cremation to the deposition of cremated ashes into public niches.
- (d) The Department has since January 2014 removed the cap on the number of sets of cremated ashes that may be placed in a public niche. The annual number of niches vacated due to co-location of ashes in other public niches and returned to the Department for re-allocation in the past 3 years is as follows -

<b>Year</b>	<b>Number of niches returned</b>
2014	8
2015	12
2016	4

- (e) In 2017-18, the Department will continue to promote co-location of cremated ashes in public niches through broadcasting of Announcements in Public Interest on radio, distribution of posters, booklets, leaflets and collaboration with the funeral trade by posting up promotional posters and distributing educational leaflets at the premises of licensed funeral parlours and undertakers of burials. The estimated expenditure is about \$0.22 million.

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