

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

FHB(FE)111

(Question Serial No. 1624)

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;
3. given that the Department will continue to take forward plans and projects to provide more crematorium and columbarium facilities, details of such plans and projects which are underway or under study; and
4. details of the Department's efforts to promote green burial in recent years, 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. (LegCo use): 49)

Reply:

1. The information sought is provided as follows –

Year	No. of Deaths	No. of Burials	No. of Cremations
2015	46 757	3 355	42 737
2016	46 662	3 253	43 556
2017	45 883	2 962	42 809

2. New niches are allocated by computer balloting. Waiting list applies only to the allocation of niches returned to the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (the Department).

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

Year	New niches	
	No. of applications	No. of niches allocated
2015	11 627	14 573
2016	178	5 239
2017	199	197

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 315 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 –

Year	Re-allocated niches			
	No. of new applications	No. of niches re-allocated	Cumulative total of applications on the waiting list	Average waiting time (months)
2015	7 164	394	21 048	45
2016	6 923	271	24 280	42
2017	7 931	346	29 168	46

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

3. On public crematorium facilities, the Department is planning to build a new crematorium at the Sandy Ridge Cemetery together with a cluster of columbarium and related facilities.

On public columbarium facilities, the Government has been promoting development of columbaria in all districts to increase the supply of public niches. Among the 24 sites identified, the construction of 1 540 new niches in the Diamond Hill Columbarium was completed in early 2012, while the construction of 1 000 niches in Cheung Chau Cemetery was completed in December 2013.

The Department has obtained funding approval from the Finance Committee of the Legislative Council in 2015 and 2016 for the construction of 160 000 niches at Tsang Tsui and 44 000 niches at Wo Hop Shek respectively. Construction works are scheduled for completion in 2019. Funding was also approved for the construction of 855 niches at Wong Nai Chung Road and 790 niches at Mui Wo Lai Chi Yuen Cemetery in 2016 and 2017 respectively. Construction works are scheduled for completion in 2018 and 2020 respectively. The Department has also consulted and obtained the in-principle support of the relevant District Councils on the construction of 200 000 niches in North District, 25 000 niches in Eastern District, 40 000 niches in Sha Tin, 88 500 niches in Kwai Tsing and 26 000 niches in Tsuen Wan. We are proceeding with the conceptual or detailed design, as applicable, of the relevant projects, and would seek funding approval for commencing site formation or construction works when ready.

4. The Department has been promoting green burial through different channels, including Announcement in the Public Interest on television and radio, promotional videos, posters and banners, a mobile app, a dedicated website, 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 –

Year \ Number of cases	Scattering of ashes		
	At sea	In Gardens of Remembrance	Total
2015	877	3 196	4 073
2016	900	4 004	4 904
2017	966	5 573*	6 539*

* The number also included green burial cases handled by private cemeteries.

There were 6 539 cases in 2017 where ashes are scattered at sea or in Gardens of Remembrance, accounting for 14.3% of the total number of deaths for that year, up from 8.7% for 2015. It takes time for the community at large to accept green burial as a more sustainable form of handling cremated human ashes. We will continue to improve the green burial facilities and services while stepping up efforts in promotion and public education.

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