

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY**FHB(FE)153****(Question Serial No. 3532)**

Head: (49) Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

Subhead (No. & title): (-) Not specified

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:

- (a) the number of deaths (Hong Kong residents) and the means of disposal of the dead (by burial, cremation or green burial) in the past 3 years;
- (b) the number of applications for public niches in Hong Kong, the number of niches allocated, the total number of applications on the waiting list and the average waiting time for a public niche in the past 3 years; and
- (c) the number of public and private niches to be provided in the next 10 years, and whether there is any long-term planning for the provision of public and private niches (such as setting targets for the supply of public and private niches) so that a comprehensive plan for the supply of niches can be formulated.

Asked by: Hon HO Chun-yin, Steven (Member Question No. (LegCo use): 77)

Reply:

- (a) The information sought is provided as follows –

Year	No. of Deaths	No. of Burials	No. of Cremations	No. of Green Burial Cases
2015	46 757	3 355	42 737	4 073
2016	46 662	3 253	43 556	4 904
2017	45 883	2 962	42 809	6 539*

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

- (b) New niches are allocated through 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.

- (c) Under the district-based columbarium development scheme, a total of 24 potential sites have been identified in the 18 districts for public columbaria development. Between the second quarter of 2011 and the end of 2017, the Government has consulted the relevant District Councils (DCs) on the projects at 14 sites, and all DCs indicated support or no-objection to the projects, which will provide around 590 000 new niches in total. As regards the remaining projects, the Government will continue the planning work and consult the relevant DCs when ready. If taken forward, they would provide an additional 300 000 niches.

The future supply of private niches is affected by various factors including private columbarium operators' business decisions, the number of private columbaria that will be licensed and the number of niches that are available for sale. It is not possible for us to project the supply of private niches.

Given the scarce land resources, the Government has been promoting green burial as a more sustainable form of ash disposal.

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