

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

FHB(FE)091

(Question Serial No. 0459)

Head: (49) Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

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

Programme: (4) Public Education and Community Involvement

Controlling Officer: Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (Miss Vivian LAU)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Food and Health

Question:

With regard to the green burial services, please advise this Committee of the following:

1. the number of cases of using the services of scattering cremains in the Gardens of Remembrance and scattering cremains at sea, the utilisation rate, and the percentage of these cases over the number of deaths in each of the past 3 years;
2. whether the Government will provide a substantial number of additional memorial walls in view of the high utilisation rate of these walls in the existing Gardens of Remembrance; if yes, the details; if no, the reason(s);
3. whether the Government will consider expanding its memorial sailing service like providing free ferry services on festive days such as Father's Day, Mother's Day and New Year's Day to allow the public to pay tribute to their parents, thereby enhancing the attractiveness of the service of scattering cremains at sea; if yes, the details; if no, the reason(s);
4. whether the Government will waive the fees for cremation service and some of the post-death arrangements if the public choose green burial for the deceased, and provide a subsidy to the funeral trade for promotion of green burial, e.g. a cash subsidy to trade members who succeed in obtaining the consent of family members of the deceased to green burial in order to further promote green burial services; if yes, the details; if no, the reason(s);
5. the manpower and expenditure involved in implementing the Department's work plan for promoting the green burial services in the coming year.

Asked by: Hon CHIANG Lai-wan (LegCo internal reference no.: 4)

Reply:

1. The information sought is provided as follows:

Year	Scattering of ashes			Percentage of total no. of deaths
	In Gardens of Remembrance*	At sea	Total	
2017	5 573	966	6 539	14.3%
2018	6 074	972	7 046	14.8%
2019	7 010	899	7 909	16.2%

*Inclusive of cases handled by private cemeteries.

2. The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department is currently managing 12 Gardens of Remembrance (GoRs) in 8 columbaria, providing a total of around 39 400 plaque spaces. As at end February 2020, around 27 900 memorial plaques were mounted in these GoRs with around 11 500 remaining spaces being available for placing memorial plaques. Besides, the Tsang Tsui Columbarium in Tuen Mun, which is scheduled for completion in the second quarter of 2020, will also provide space for around 20 000 memorial plaques in its GoR. The Department will continue to explore the feasibility of providing more plaque spaces in its GoRs where circumstances permit.
3. The Department has arranged free sailings around the Ching Ming Festival and the Chung Yeung Festival every year since 2014. The previous users of the free service of scattering ashes at sea are offered free ferry rides to the designated areas at sea for ash scattering to pay tribute to the deceased. In 2019, there were around 800 participants in memorial sailings. The number of such sailings will be increased in 2020-21 to allow the public to pay respect to the deceased at the waters where ashes were scattered. To further enhance public awareness of the service of scattering ashes at sea and step up promotion of green burial, the Department launched a trial scheme in April 2019 to invite the public to visit the service of scattering ashes at sea at no charge. During these visits, which are organised on a monthly basis, dedicated staff will introduce the service to the visitors. So far, more than 50 people have participated in such visits.
4. The Department has considered the merits of waiving the charges for cremation or other related services in those cases where green burial is opted for. But on balance, it is not considered ripe for pursuing such an idea at this stage, for fear that some may misconstrue this as according greater importance to financial considerations than filial piety. Nevertheless, the Department maintains an open mind towards waiver of certain fees and charges as a modest financial incentive to encourage people's adoption of more environmentally friendly modes of ash disposal, should there be such calls in the community.
5. In 2020-21, green burial promotion will be coordinated by a dedicated team, comprising 7 officers and supporting staff. The estimated provision earmarked for promoting green burial in 2020-21 is about \$17.2 million.

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