

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

FHB(FE)081

(Question Serial No. 3049)

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 Diane WONG)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Food and Health

Question:

In connection with the public columbaria and crematoria in Hong Kong, please advise this Committee of:

1. the service capacity of various crematoria managed by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (the Department), the actual usage figures and utilisation rates of the facilities of the crematoria in each of the past 3 years;
2. the number of deaths of local residents, with a breakdown by burial method (including scattering cremains at sea, scattering cremains in the Gardens of Remembrance, interring ashes in public niches, and interring ashes in private niches) in each of the past 3 years;
3. the latest number of applications for public niches and the average waiting time;
4. the number of new niches to be provided in the next 10 years and their locations (please present the information in tabular form);
5. the number of applications for a licence under the Private Columbaria Ordinance received, the number of cases approved and the time required for processing the applications; and
6. the locations, quantity and utilisation rates of the temporary storage facilities for cremains provided by the Department.

Asked by: Hon CHAN Hak-kan (LegCo internal reference no.: 57)

Reply:

1. Information on the number of cremation sessions released and sessions booked as well as the percentage of use in public crematoria managed by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department in the past 3 calendar years is as follows:

Name of Crematorium	2018			2019			2020		
	Number of cremation sessions released	Number of cremation sessions booked	Percentage of cremation sessions booked	Number of cremation sessions released	Number of cremation sessions booked	Percentage of cremation sessions booked	Number of cremation sessions released	Number of cremation sessions booked	Percentage of cremation sessions booked
Cape Collinson	14 869	14 721	99.0%	15 532	15 240	98.1%	14 825	14 435	97.4%
Diamond Hill	8 270	8 242	99.7%	7 970	7 961	99.9%	8 341	8 324	99.8%
Fu Shan	6 148	6 101	99.2%	6 413	6 381	99.5%	6 094	6 067	99.6%
Kwai Chung	7 303	7 273	99.6%	7 752	7 722	99.6%	6 598	6 564	99.5%
Cheung Chau	1 222	133	10.9%	1 340	118	8.8%	1 346	136	10.1%
Wo Hop Shek	7 421	7 333	98.8%	8 300	8 121	97.8%	11 320	10 939	96.6%
Total:	45 233	43 803	96.8%	47 307	45 543	96.3%	48 524	46 465	95.8%

2. The information sought is provided as follows:

Year	Number of deaths	Number of burials#	Number of cremations	Number of cases of scattering of ashes		Number of ashes interment in public niches@
				At sea	In Gardens of Remembrance*	
2018	47 479	3 136	43 803	972	6 074	3 657
2019	48 706	2 780	45 543	899	7 010	4 196
2020	50 653	2 852	46 465	854	6 822	39 598

Inclusive of cases in private cemeteries and permitted burial grounds.

* Inclusive of cases handled by private cemeteries.

@ The Department does not keep statistics on the number of cases of interring ashes in private niches.

3. At present, the Department allocates new extendable niches to eligible applicants by open drawing of lots and computer random balloting (rather than on a first-come, first-served basis). Regarding the allocation of new public niches each year, new niches at Tsang Tsui Columbarium and Wo Hop Shek Columbarium Phase VI were made available for public application in May 2020, and a total of 24 584 eligible applications were received. Niches were allocated to all applicants by drawing of lots and computer balloting in October. Furthermore, the Department launched a one-year pilot scheme to allocate niches on a monthly basis in December 2020. Under the scheme, the Department would accept applications from the public for new niches at Tsang Tsui Columbarium all the year round. About 1 700 niches, together with the unallocated ones from the previous month, would be allocated each month. In the past three months (i.e. December 2020, January and February 2021), the Department received a total of 6 708 eligible applications, all of which were successful. It took about 50 days the longest from the time an applicant submitted his application to the time he got notified of the niche allocation. In the next few years, with new columbarium projects being completed one after another, the number of new

niches available for public application is estimated to be about 30 000 to over 40 000 each year.

4. The Government implements a district-based columbarium development scheme. Between the second quarter of 2011 and the end of 2020, the Government consulted the relevant District Councils (DCs) on public columbarium projects at 14 sites, which would altogether provide around 600 000 new niches. Projects located at Diamond Hill in Wong Tai Sin, Cheung Chau, Wong Nai Chung Road in Wan Chai, Lai Chi Yuen in Mui Wo, Tsang Tsui in Tuen Mun and Wo Hop Shek Phase I have been completed, providing around 210 000 niches. Two approved projects, located at Cape Collinson Road in Eastern District and Shek Mun in Sha Tin, are underway. They are estimated to be commissioned in 2022 and 2024, providing 25 000 and 40 000 niches respectively. The Government will continue to take forward other projects, with a view to securing the medium and long-term supply of public niches.
5. As of 28 February 2021, the Private Columbaria Licensing Board (PCLB) was processing 237 applications for specified instruments submitted by 99 private columbaria. The figures are summarised as follows:

Types of applications	Approved	Approved in principle	Refused	Withdrawn	Being processed
Application for a licence	6	2	21	11	87
Application for an exemption	1	1	12	9	39
Application for a temporary suspension of liability (TSOL)	0	11	29	13	111
Total number of applications	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	237
Number of private columbaria	7	13 ^{Note 1}	26	14	99 ^{Note 2}

Note 1: The application for a TSOL and the application for an exemption submitted by one columbarium have been approved in principle.

Note 2: Including 13 columbaria of which applications for a licence/an exemption/a TSOL have been approved in principle.

The time the PCLB takes to process a licence application depends on the actual circumstances of the case, particularly on whether the private columbarium has complied with the relevant requirements stipulated in the Private Columbaria Ordinance (Cap. 630) and those specified by the PCLB (including the requirements relating to planning, land, buildings, fire safety, electrical and mechanical safety, management plan, right to use the premises, environmental protection, etc.), and whether the applicant has submitted sufficient documents to prove that the private columbarium has complied with the requirements.

6. At present the Department provides some 74 500 temporary storage spaces for cremains at Kwai Chung Crematorium, Wo Hop Shek Columbarium Phases III and V,

Cape Collinson Columbarium, Fu Shan Columbarium and Hong Kong Cemetery. The temporary storage spaces at Kwai Chung Crematorium and Wo Hop Shek Columbarium Phase III have been opened for public use. Regarding these two facilities, the information sought is provided as follows:

	Kwai Chung Crematorium (For storage of cremains bags)	Wo Hop Shek Columbarium Phase III (For storage of cinerary urns)
Capacity for temporary storage of cremains	10 080 spaces	5 040 spaces
Number of spaces occupied as at 28.2.2021	976	1 781
Utilisation rate	9.7%	35.3%

In addition, it is estimated that some 2 600 temporary storage spaces will be available by the end of 2021.

- End -