

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY**FHB(FE)099****(Question Serial No. 2768)**Head: (49) Food and Environmental Hygiene DepartmentSubhead (No. & title): (000) Operational expensesProgramme: (2) Environmental Hygiene and Related ServicesControlling Officer: Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (Miss Diane WONG)Director of Bureau: Secretary for Food and HealthQuestion:

Please provide the number of new niches available for interment of ashes of the deceased in the columbaria under the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (the Department) last year, the number of applications currently on the waiting list for niches managed by the Department, the median waiting time for interment of ashes in niches managed by the Department after cremation of the deceased in each of the past 3 years, and the number of niches vacated for re-allocation last year after the relaxation of the cap on the ash interment capacity of niches.

Asked by: Hon CHENG Chung-tai (LegCo internal reference no.: 129)Reply:

The number of new public niches available for allocation in 2020 is as follows:

Location	Number of niches
Tsang Tsui Columbarium (second phase), Tuen Mun	22 900
Wo Hop Shek Columbarium Phase VI, Fanling	22 050
Cheung Chau Columbarium	580

At present, the Food and Environmental Hygiene 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.

The Department does not keep information on the median waiting time for interment of ashes in public niches after cremation of the remains.

The Department has removed the cap on the number of sets of cremated ashes that may be interred in a public niche since January 2014. In 2020, 28 niches were returned to the Department.

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