

**CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY**

**EEB(F)117**

**(Question Serial No. 2261)**

Head: (49) Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

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

Programme: (1) Food Safety and Public Health

Controlling Officer: Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene (Ms Irene YOUNG)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Environment and Ecology

Question:

At present, members of the public may lodge water seepage complaints with the Joint Offices for Investigation of Water Seepage Complaints (JO) set up by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department and the Buildings Department. When JO identifies the source of water seepage, the parties concerned will be required to deal with the problem within a certain period of time or face prosecution. However, there are often comments that it takes way too long for JO to handle the complaints, with some cases remaining unresolved for as long as 8 years. In this connection, please advise this Committee of:

- 1) the existing manpower establishment and expenditure of JO;
- 2) the number of cases received in each of the past 5 years;
- 3) the number of completed cases in each of the past 5 years, and among which the number of cases with the source of water seepage successfully identified and the success rate;
- 4) the average time required for completing a case, and the shortest and longest time taken to complete a case in the past 5 years;
- 5) the number of cases yet to be completed; and
- 6) whether the Government plans to introduce more advanced technologies for testing water seepage, such as infrared thermography and microwave tomography; if yes, the details and estimated expenditure.

Asked by: Hon LEE Tsz-king, Dominic (LegCo internal reference no.: 33)

Reply:

- 1) The staffing establishment and expenditure in 2022-23 of the Joint Offices for Investigation of Water Seepage Complaints (JO) set up by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) and the Buildings Department (BD) are provided as follows:

<b>FEHD</b>	
Number of investigation and coordinating staff	252
Staff costs and departmental expenses (\$ million)	192.1 (Revised estimate)
<b>BD</b>	
Number of professional and technical staff	82
Staff costs and departmental expenses (\$ million)	67.5 (Revised estimate)
Expenditure for engaging outsourced consultants (\$ million)	38.6 (Revised estimate)

2)&3) The number of cases received, the number of cases completed, the number of cases with source of water seepage confirmed and the success rate of identifying the source of water seepage in the past 5 years are tabulated as follows:

Item	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Complaints received	36 684	34 169	39 166	43 233	39 555
Total number of cases handled <sup>1</sup>	28 221	28 096	35 397	36 262	38 275
Cases screened out <sup>1, 2</sup>	14 571	13 867	21 345	21 813	24 170
Total number of cases with investigation concluded <sup>1</sup>	13 650	14 229	14 052	14 449	14 105
(a) Cases with source of water seepage confirmed	5 729	5 663	6 746	6 000	5 186
(b) Cases with source of water seepage not confirmed and water seepage persisted	3 164	2 891	3 403	4 467	4 384
(c) Cases with seepage ceased during investigation	4 757	5 675	3 903	3 982	4 535
Success rate of identifying the source of water seepage among the cases with investigation completed [ $\frac{(a)}{(a)+(b)} \times 100\%$ ]	64.4%	66.2%	66.5%	57.3%	54.2%

Note 1: The number of cases does not necessarily correspond to the number of cases received in the same year. Some of them are received before that year.

Note 2: JO has prescribed standards and requirements for the investigation of water seepage in buildings. Some cases will be screened out if the moisture content is below 35%, the seepage originates from the property owned by the

complainant, the nature of the case does not involve water seepage or the complainant has withdrawn the complaint.

- 4) JO does not keep information on the average time required for completing a case.
- 5) As at 8 February 2023, the number of cases yet to be completed was 11 651.
- 6) Generally speaking, JO staff will carry out initial investigation to identify the source of seepage, including carrying out colour water test for drainage pipes. In cases where the source of seepage cannot be identified by the initial investigation, professional investigation will be conducted with the assistance of outsourced consultants.

Since late June 2018, JO has applied new testing technologies, such as infrared thermography and microwave tomography, in professional investigation in selected pilot districts where applicable. With the experience gained and data obtained in the pilot application, JO has extended the use of these technologies to a total of 12 districts as at March 2021. Nevertheless, under special circumstances (e.g. spalling of concrete ceilings at the locations of water seepage, and blockage of pipes or other facilities, etc.) where these technologies cannot be applied effectively, the outsourced consultants have to continue to employ the conventional methods. JO is refining the technical guidelines and procedures relating to the use of the new technologies and plans to gradually extend the use of such technologies to other districts.

In 2023-24, the estimated expenditure for engaging outsourced consultants to conduct water seepage investigation using new technologies or conventional methods is about \$52.3 million. With the assistance of outsourced consultants, BD's professional and technical staff in JO are responsible for carrying out professional investigation using new testing technologies. As this is part of their overall duties in handling water seepage reports, BD cannot provide a separate breakdown of the estimated expenditure for conducting water seepage investigation using new testing technologies.

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