

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

EEB(F)152

(Question Serial No. 0106)

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 (Ms Irene YOUNG)

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Environment and Ecology

Question:

Regarding water seepage cases in buildings, please advise this Committee of:

1. the statistics and investigation results of the water seepage cases in buildings handled by the Joint Office (JO) set up by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department and the Buildings Department in each of the past 3 years;
2. the effective measures available for JO to deal with the problem when owners refuse entry of the responsible officers for inspection, through which JO staff can enter the premises to perform the required work and tests as early as possible; and
3. whether the standard of justifying a water seepage case in buildings will be lowered and various testing methods and new equipment will be used to identify the source of seepage in an accurate manner. If yes, the details; if no, the reason(s).

Asked by: Hon YANG Wing-kit (LegCo internal reference no.: 25)

Reply:

1. Statistics on handling of water seepage cases in buildings by the Joint Office for Investigation of Water Seepage Complaints (JO) and the investigation results in the past 3 years are as follows:

Number of cases	2020	2021	2022
Total number of cases handled ¹	35 397	36 262	38 275
(a) Cases screened out ^{1,2}	21 345	21 813	24 170
(b) Total number of cases with investigation concluded ¹	14 052	14 449	14 105
(i) Cases with source of water seepage identified	6 746	6 000	5 186
(ii) Cases with source of water seepage not identified and investigation terminated	3 403	4 467	4 384

Number of cases	2020	2021	2022
(iii) Cases with seepage ceased during investigation	3 903	3 982	4 535
Nuisance Notices issued ¹ under the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap.132)	5 926	5 281	4 587
Cases with prosecution instituted ^{1, 3}	225	216	146
Nuisance Orders issued by the Court ¹	72	100	60

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.

Note 3: Including prosecution cases for non-compliance with Nuisance Notices and Nuisance Orders.

2. If JO staff's access to the suspected premises for investigation is denied during the course of investigation, JO will apply to the Court for a warrant to effect entry into premises under section 126 of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132), so as to enter the premises concerned to proceed with the investigation and tests.
3. Under normal circumstances, the humidity level on the surface of concrete or plaster is subject to the ambient relative humidity. The ambient relative humidity of a room with water supply facilities will usually be higher, thus affecting the basic moisture content (MC) level of concrete or plaster surface in the room. According to past experience, the source of water seepage cannot be identified if the MC level of a concrete or plaster surface is not substantially higher than the basic level. Hence, JO has set the MC level at 35% or above as the threshold for initiating investigation for the effective use of resources.

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.

- End -