

**CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY**

**(Question Serial No. 1006)**

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:

On abating environmental nuisances relating to dripping air-conditioners and water seepage, please advise this Committee of the following:

1. Are the current funding and manpower arrangement of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department for the work on water seepage sufficient? Please set out in tabular form the relevant information on staff recruitment and funding of the Joint Offices for Investigation of Water Seepage Complaints (JO).
2. In response to public complaints that the waiting time for cases handled by JO generally exceeds 90 days, will the Department consider increasing the manpower or funding in this respect?
3. Regarding the determination and repair for water seepage cases, has the Department considered increasing the funding to acquire more advanced equipment to ensure efficiency and accuracy?

Asked by: Hon CHAN Han-pan (LegCo internal reference no.: 23)

Reply:

1. The Joint Office (JO), which is set up by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) and the Buildings Department (BD) for the investigation of water seepage cases in buildings, will suitably deploy manpower to handle the cases. The staffing and expenditure in 2023-24 are as follows:

<b>FEHD</b>	
Number of investigation and coordinating staff	252
Staff costs and departmental expenses (\$ million)	195.9 (Revised estimate)
<b>BD</b>	
Number of professional and technical staff	102
Staff costs and departmental expenses (\$ million)	82.7 (Revised estimate)
Expenditure for engaging outsourced consultants (\$ million)	45.0 (Revised estimate)

2. JO has, since January 2022, published on its thematic webpage on water seepage ([www.waterseepage.gov.hk](http://www.waterseepage.gov.hk)) for public information the time required for investigations to reports on water seepage in buildings each year. The percentage of cases with investigations completed and informant notified of the results within 90 working days was 68.5 in 2022. Most of the cases that could not be completed within 90 working days were more complicated, for examples, more than one source of water seepage or repeated or intermittent water seepage are involved, multiple tests are required to identify the source, failure of owners or occupiers to co-operate with the investigation, etc.

To enhance the efficiency and effectiveness in handling reports on water seepage in buildings, JO has implemented a series of improvement measures, which include: setting up 4 regional JOs to facilitate the provision of water seepage investigation services for residents in the region, enhancing communication between staff of JO(FEHD) and JO(BD) and the operational efficiency; enhancing the Water Seepage Complaint Management System to facilitate effective monitoring of follow-up actions of water seepage cases; streamlining the work procedures to reduce the number of visits prior to application for a Warrant to Effect Entry into Premises and standardising the documents for the application for warrants; stepping up monitoring of the consultants' work performance; and setting up a water seepage resource centre and a customer service team to enhance public awareness on the common causes, testing and repair methods of water seepage, as well as to advise on practical ways to resolve water seepage disputes.

In addition, since mid-September 2023, JO has implemented a new set of investigation procedures in 4 districts on a trial basis. After completion of Stage I investigation, it will carry out at the same time Stage II initial investigation and Stage III professional investigation, which are originally conducted sequentially, to see whether the target investigation time required for applicable cases can be reduced by 30% from 90 to approximately 60 working days. In view of this, since 2023-24, JO has recruited additional staff, including time-limited professional and technical staff. JO will continue to optimise and streamline its work procedures to expedite the handling of water seepage cases.

The Government is conducting an exercise to amend environmental hygiene-related legislation. The proposals include extending the hours for entering premises suspected of causing public health nuisance (including water seepage in buildings) for investigation into the evening, and stipulating that non-compliance with the Notice of Intended Entry issued by government officers is an offence, so as to enable government officers to enter the premises concerned as soon as possible to conduct investigation.

JO will review the resource and manpower arrangements in a timely manner, and deploy them flexibly to meet actual operational needs.

3. Since 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 14 districts as at December 2023. Nevertheless, under special circumstances, such as small seepage area, spalling of ceiling concrete affected by water seepage or blockage by tile

finishes or other facilities (including suspended ceiling or pipes, etc.) on the ceiling, where the new technologies cannot be applied effectively, the outsourced consultants have to continue to employ the conventional methods.

JO will continue to use the new testing technologies effectively to identify the source of water seepage. Depending on the availability of relevant service providers in the market, JO will gradually extend the use of these technologies to other districts. It will review the resource and manpower arrangements in a timely manner, and deploy them flexibly to meet actual operational needs.

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