

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

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(Question Serial No. 3076)

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:

There are complaints from members of the public that the Joint Office set up by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department and the Buildings Department has failed to provide sufficient support for the complainants, and the methods for identifying the source of water seepage are also inadequate. In this connection, please advise this Committee of the following:

1. What is the estimated public expenditure involving the Joint Office in 2023-24? What are the benchmarks for measuring its performance?
2. Currently, investigators mostly carry out colour water tests to identify the source of water seepage. What is the estimated expenditure earmarked by the Department for colour water tests in 2023-24?
3. In addition to colour water test, many other testing methods are also popular in the market, such as infrared device, conductivity sensor, etc. Is there any plan to introduce other devices?
4. Under the existing mechanism, will the case be referred to other government departments (e.g. Water Supplies Department) for follow-up action if the seepage is found to be caused by other reasons such as water pipe leakage?

Asked by: Hon LAM San-keung (LegCo internal reference no.: 39)

Reply:

1. The expenditure (revised estimate) of 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, in 2023-24 are as follows:

FEHD	
Staff costs and departmental expenses (\$ million)	195.9

BD	
Staff costs and departmental expenses (\$ million)	82.7
Expenditure for engaging outsourced consultants (\$ million)	45.0

JO publishes on its thematic webpage on water seepage (www.waterseepage.gov.hk) for public information its actual performance in carrying out investigations to reports on water seepage in buildings by year, that is, the percentage of cases with investigation completed and informant notified of the results within 90 working days (68.5% in 2022). The progress of the investigation is subject to a number of factors, including the complexity of the case (such as whether the case involves more than one source of water seepage, or repeated or intermittent water seepage conditions so that multiple tests are required), and whether the owners or occupants are cooperative.

- At present, JO staff will use conventional testing methods, including colour water test in drainage pipes, in Stage II initial investigation. In Stage III professional investigation, apart from using new testing technologies such as infrared thermography (IT) and microwave tomography (MT), the outsourced consultants engaged by JO will also employ conventional methods, such as ponding test and water spray test at floor slabs and walls with colour dyes, where necessary.

JO does not keep a separate breakdown of the expenditure on color water test.

- Since June 2018, JO has applied new testing technologies, such as IT and MT, 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.
- If suspected building safety issue/drainage pipe defect or wastage of water caused by defective water supply pipes is found during investigation, JO will refer the case to BD or the Water Supplies Department to take corresponding follow-up and law enforcement actions under the Buildings Ordinance (Cap. 123) and the Waterworks Ordinance (Cap. 102).

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