

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

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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:

With regard to the Joint Offices for Investigation of Water Seepage Complaints (JO) set up by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department and the Buildings Department (BD), please advise this Committee of the following:

1. Please set out in tabular form the number of (i) cases received; (ii) cases with investigation completed and the investigation results; (iii) cases screened out and the reasons; (iv) cases being processed, and (v) cases referred to the BD or the Water Supplies Department for follow-up action and the reasons, in the past 3 years.
2. What are the existing manpower establishment, expenditure and estimated expenditure of JO?
3. JO has implemented a new set of investigation procedures in Wong Tai Sin, Yuen Long, North District and Islands District on a trial basis. After completion of Stage I investigation, it will try to carry out at the same time Stage II initial investigation and Stage III professional investigation, which are originally conducted sequentially. Has the effectiveness of the new set of investigation procedures been reviewed? Will they be extended to other districts? If yes, what are the details? If no, what is/are the reason(s)?
4. How effective is the usage of new testing technologies in professional investigation in the selected pilot districts? Are there plans to extend their usage to other districts? If yes, what are the details and estimated expenditure? If no, what is/are the reason(s)?

Asked by: Hon LI Sai-wing, Stanley (LegCo internal reference no.: 32)

Reply:

1. Statistics on water seepage cases received and handled by 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 each of the past 3 years are as follows:

Number of cases	2021	2022	2023
Cases received	43 233	39 555	45 033
Total number of cases handled ¹	36 262	38 275	43 367

Number of cases	2021	2022	2023
Cases screened out ^{1, 2}	21 813	24 170	27 215
Total number of cases with investigation concluded ¹	14 449	14 105	16 152
(a) Cases with source of water seepage identified	6 000	5 186	5 669
(b) Cases with source of water seepage not identified and water seepage continued	4 467	4 384	5 495
(c) Cases with water seepage ceased during investigation	3 982	4 535	4 988
Cases referred to BD for follow-up action ³	1 514	1 243	1 436
Cases referred to the Water Supplies Department (WSD) for follow-up action ⁴	590	702	861

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 water seepage originates from the property owned by the complainant, the nature of the case does not involve water seepage in buildings or the complainant has withdrawn the complaint.

Note 3: If the water seepage poses a risk to building safety or relates to defective drainage of a building, JO will refer the case to BD which will take corresponding follow-up and law enforcement actions under the Buildings Ordinance (Cap. 123).

Note 4: If wastage of water suspected to be caused by defective water supply pipes is found during investigation, JO will refer the case to WSD which will take corresponding follow-up and law enforcement actions under the Waterworks Ordinance (Cap. 102).

As at 8 February 2024, the number of cases yet to be completed was 12 407.

2. The staffing establishment and expenditure of JO in 2023-24 are as follows:

FEHD	
Number of investigation and coordinating staff	252
Staff costs and departmental expenses (\$ million)	195.9 (Revised estimate)
BD	
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)

3. Since mid-September 2023, JO has implemented a new set of investigation procedures in 4 districts, namely, Wong Tai Sin, Yuen Long, North District and Islands District, on a trial basis. After completion of Stage I investigation, it tries to 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. JO will review the effectiveness of the new work mode in the second quarter of 2024, discuss with the consultants on matters such as contractual arrangements and manpower deployment, and assess the capacity of service providers in the market. After the assessment, it will consider the feasibility of extending the new work mode to more districts.
4. 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, it 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 testing methods. JO has been closely monitoring the effectiveness of the new testing technologies.

As at December 2023, the success rate of cases using the new testing technologies to identify the source of water seepage is approximately 64%. 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 more districts.

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