

CONTROLLING OFFICER'S REPLY

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(Question Serial No. 2222)

Head: (49) Food and Environmental Hygiene Department

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

Programme: (4) Public Education and Community Involvement

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

Director of Bureau: Secretary for Environment and Ecology

Question:

Regarding the promotion of green burial, please advise this Committee of:

1. the current number of registrants of the Green Burial Central Register;
2. the number of burial cases by way of scattering ashes at sea or in Gardens of Remembrance (GoRs) and their percentage in the total number of deaths in each of the past 3 years;
3. the expenditure incurred by the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department in providing cemeteries and crematoria services (including the services of scattering ashes at sea and in GoRs) in the past 3 years; and
4. the result of the design thinking consultancy study launched by the Department to further promote green burial and enhance service; and
5. the staffing and expenditure involved in the promotion of green burial.

Asked by: Hon YANG Wing-kit (LegCo internal reference no.: 27)

Reply:

1. The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department encourages the public to plan in advance their after-death arrangements and make their wishes known to their families. In this connection, the Department set up the Green Burial Central Register in January 2019 as a means for members of the public to indicate their wishes for green burial. As at 31 December 2023, over 11 800 members of the public have registered their wishes in the central register. Even if there is no prior registration, descendants can still adopt green burial for the deceased. The Department will continue providing and enhancing green burial facilities and services, as well as strengthening public education and publicity, so as to encourage the public to adopt green burial and register in the central register.
2. The number of green burial cases and their percentages out of the total number of deaths in the past 3 years are provided as follows:

| Number of cases Year | Scattering of ashes | | | Percentage out of the total number of deaths |
|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|--------|-------|--|
| | In Gardens of Remembrance (GoRs)* | At sea | Total | |
| 2021 | 7 112 | 906 | 8 018 | 15.6% |
| 2022 | 8 437 | 1 012 | 9 449 | 15.4% |
| 2023 | 8 237 | 1 144 | 9 381 | 16.5% |

*Including cases handled by private cemeteries.

3. The overall expenditure incurred by the Department in providing cemeteries and crematoria services, including the service for scattering of ashes at sea and in GoRs, in the financial years of 2021-22, 2022-23 and 2023-24 was \$490.8 million, \$558.8 million and \$509.0 million (revised estimate) respectively. There is no separate breakdown of the expenditure by type of service.
4. The Department launched a design thinking consultancy study in mid-2022. The aim of the study is to gain a better understanding of the needs of users and the views of stakeholders and the general public, so as to formulate more effective strategies and measures for the promotion of public understanding and acceptance of green burial, enhance the green burial services provided by the Government and encourage more people to use the services. The consultant invited relevant stakeholders, including members of the public, representatives from the funeral trade, academics, operators of private cemeteries and representatives from non-governmental organisations, to participate in workshops and face-to-face interviews, in order to gain a thorough understanding of their views. A consultancy report has been preliminarily completed. The Department will carefully study the recommendations in the report and their feasibility, so as to draw up suitable measures to encourage more members of the public to opt for green burial. The Government will continue to enhance green burial services and strengthen public education and publicity to gradually make green burial the mainstream arrangement of handling ashes, so as to achieve the policy objectives of being more environmental friendly and sustainable development.
5. In 2023-24, green burial promotion was coordinated by a dedicated team comprising 6 full-time staff. The expenditure for promoting green burial in 2023-24 was about \$19 million.

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