

# AFCD urges grave sweepers to prevent hill fires

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) today (March 25) reminded people paying tribute to ancestors at graveyards in the countryside during the Ching Ming Festival period to exercise caution and prevent hill fires.

An AFCD spokesman said it is an offence under the Forests and Countryside Ordinance (Cap. 96) to leave behind kindling or burn offerings without considering fire risks in the countryside. Any person who contravenes the ordinance may be prosecuted and is liable to a maximum fine of \$25,000 and one year's imprisonment upon conviction.

AFCD staff will step up patrols at graveyards in the countryside during the Ching Ming Festival period and take enforcement action against any irregularities.

The majority of hill fires in the countryside are caused by human negligence. Accidents can be prevented if grave sweepers observe some simple guidelines:

- \* Remove weeds around graves with tools and never burn weeds;
- \* Burning should only be done inside a container or iron bucket;
- \* Never leave burning offerings unattended; and
- \* Make sure all kindling is put out before leaving.

The spokesman said that metal containers for burning offerings properly will be handed out to grave sweepers who have such a need at suitable locations in country parks during the Ching Ming Festival. The AFCD will also patrol hill fire black spots and distribute hill fire prevention leaflets together with the Fire Services Department, the Hong Kong Police Force and the Civil Aid Service.

Members of the public are reminded to keep the countryside clean and properly clean up their offerings or rubbish.