

[AFCD urges grave sweepers to prevent hill fires](#)

The Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) today (March 29) 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 burn offerings without considering fire risks or leave behind kindling 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.

The AFCD staff will step up patrols at graveyards in the countryside during the Ching Ming Festival period, and take enforcement action against those who are found in breach of the law.

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

- * Remove weeds around the 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 the country parks during the Ching Ming Festival. The AFCD will also deploy additional staff to patrol hill fire black spots.

Members of the public are reminded to keep the countryside clean. Before leaving, grave sweepers should not leave behind their offerings or rubbish. The AFCD issued fixed penalty notices to 40 persons for littering in country parks last year.

In view of the gravity of the COVID-19 epidemic, the spokesman also appealed to the public to avoid grave sweeping during the peak period on the day of the Ching Ming Festival to avoid crowds to contain the spread of the virus. The public must comply with the Prevention and Control of Disease (Prohibition on Gathering) Regulation (Cap. 599G) and the Prevention and Control of Disease (Wearing of Mask) Regulation (Cap. 599I). The number of people in group gatherings should not be more than two persons and all persons shall wear a mask in country parks.

Meanwhile, the spokesman reminded grave sweepers to avoid meal gatherings at worship sites or in crowded places. They should maintain good

personal and environmental hygiene as well as properly dispose of used masks and waste so as to lower the risk of disease transmission. He added that all country park barbecue sites and campsites will remain closed until further notice.