

LCQ11: Fire safety of old buildings

Following is a question by the Hon Lee Chun-keung and a written reply by the Secretary for Security, Mr Tang Ping-keung, in the Legislative Council today (April 24):

Question:

It has been reported that a No. 3 alarm fire which broke out in a building in Yau Ma Tei earlier resulted in multiple casualties, arousing concerns about the fire safety of old buildings in urban areas, particularly those "three-nil buildings" that do not have owners' corporations or any form of residents' organisations, nor employ property management companies. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the number of inspections conducted by the Hong Kong Fire Services Department (FSD) and the Buildings Department (BD) in respect of the fire safety of old buildings and three-nil buildings in urban areas in each of the past five years (with a breakdown by District Council district);

(2) given that when the relevant buildings are found not to comply with the requirements of the Fire Safety (Buildings) Ordinance (Cap. 572), FSD and BD will issue Fire Safety Directions (Directions) to the owners and/or occupiers of such buildings, requiring them to carry out the specified fire safety improvement works, of the total number of Directions issued in each of the past 10 years, as well as the status of compliance with such Directions;

(3) whether a mechanism has been put in place to ensure that the Directions are complied with at an appropriate time; if so, of the details, including whether the progress of compliance with the Directions is regularly reviewed so that follow-up actions can be taken in a timely manner; if there is no such mechanism, the reasons for that and how it ensures that the Directions will not ultimately sink like a stone;

(4) of the respective total numbers of applications received and approved under the third round of the Fire Safety Improvement Works Subsidy Scheme launched in 2023; and

(5) whether it has plans to assist owners or occupiers of old buildings in enhancing the fire safety of the buildings by making good use of technology; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

Fire safety in old buildings is a matter of great concern to the Government. It has been the goal of the Government to provide residents and the community at large better protection by enhancing fire safety in

buildings, especially the old ones. This also leads to the enactment of the Fire Safety (Buildings) Ordinance (Cap. 572) (the Ordinance) in the first place. The Ordinance stipulates that composite and domestic buildings constructed on or before March 1, 1987, or with the plans of the building works first submitted to the Buildings Department (BD) for approval on or before that day (target buildings) must be enhanced to meet modern fire protection requirements. Under the Ordinance, the enforcement authority (EA) on fire safety measures in relation to planning, design and construction of buildings is the Director of Buildings; while the EA in relation to fire service installations and equipment (FSIs) is the Director of Fire Services. The Fire Services Department (FSD) and the BD will issue Fire Safety Directions (Directions) to owners and/or occupiers with regard to fire safety measures of buildings under their respective purview and specify the required fire safety improvement works. The Ordinance aims to enhance the fire safety standards of target buildings, but this does not mean that these buildings are subject to imminent fire risks. In fact, these buildings were constructed in accordance with applicable construction and fire safety standards prevailing at the time when they were built, for meeting the relevant requirements at the time of their construction.

The EAs will deploy officers to conduct joint inspection of the target buildings. Then, in light of the actual condition of the building and in accordance with the requirements of the Ordinance, the EAs will issue Directions (Note) to owners and/or occupiers requiring them to provide appropriate FSIs and/or carry out works in relation to fire safety construction, with a view to enhancing the fire safety standards of their buildings. There are about 14 000 target buildings regulated under the Ordinance. As of end February 2024, the FSD and the BD have inspected about 10 920 target buildings and issued a total of over 360 000 Directions. Among the Directions issued, about 40 per cent of them have been complied with or discharged (i.e. no follow-up action is required for those Directions), with the remaining some 60 per cent are being followed-up on, including cases with works under preparation/cases in progress. The EAs will comprehensively review those cases which are being followed-up on. Relevant owner and/or occupier, who fails to comply with a Direction/Fire Safety Compliance Order (FSCO) without reasonable excuse, is guilty of an offence. The EAs can take enforcement action accordingly. In fact, since the Ordinance has come into force (as of end-February 2024), there are more than 3 600 cases, which had failed to comply with Directions/FSCO without reasonable excuse, being successfully prosecuted.

In order to further enhance the fire safety standards of old buildings, the Government is expediting the relevant work on amending the Ordinance to empower the FSD and the BD to carry out fire safety improvement works for owners who have failed to comply with the requirements of the Ordinance (hereafter, defaulted works), and to recover the relevant fees from them upon completion of the defaulted works. The Government is stepping up the relevant work and will shorten the time required for submitting the proposed amendment bill by two to three months, with a view to submitting it to the Legislative Council for scrutiny as soon as possible.

Through providing financial, technical and co-ordination support, as well as taking enforcement actions and other various measures, the Government, by adopting multi-pronged approach, will continue to strive for raising the compliance rate of the Ordinance, effectively enhancing the fire safety standards of old buildings so as to meet the policy objective of the Government.

In consultation with the relevant bureau and departments, my reply to the question raised by the Hon Lee is as follows:

(1) The number of target buildings jointly inspected by the FSD and the BD in the past five years is tabulated below –

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Number of target buildings jointly inspected by the FSD and the BD	400	400	400	406	402

With regard to the number of inspections of target buildings under the implementation of the Ordinance, the number of inspections conducted by the FSD in the past five years is tabulated below# –

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Number of inspections of target buildings conducted by the FSD@	54 837	50 279	54 306	46 964	44 769

@ The FSD does not maintain breakdown on the above number of inspections by District Council districts.

The BD does not compile statistics on the number of inspections.

The EAs do not compile statistics on "three-nil" buildings regulated under the Ordinance.

(2) The number of Directions issued by the FSD and the BD and the compliance status in the past ten years are tabulated below –

	Number of Directions issued	Number of Directions complied with or discharged (i.e. no follow-up action required) in that year%
2014	22 007	8 280
2015	22 757	9 177
2016	17 499	9 016
2017	18 559	9 138
2018	25 712	9 739
2019	28 102	14 654
2020	17 022	12 391
2021	32 616	9 468

2022	22 300	9 606
2023	23 215	10 871
Total	229 789	102 340

% Directions that are discharged include Directions related to demolished buildings, as well as buildings that have been approved to adopt facilitation measures, etc.

(3) The EAs will take action to follow-up on the compliance status of Directions of relevant owners and/or occupiers after Directions were issued, with a view to ensuring the timely compliance of the Directions. Generally speaking, the EAs normally give building owners one year to comply with the Directions and, on the premise that basic fire safety will not be compromised, adopt a flexible and pragmatic approach in handling individual cases.

The FSD will carry out fire safety improvement works inspection to target buildings issued with Directions at least once per year, where the inspection includes reviewing whether fire safety improvement works has been commenced for the target building, or following up on the progress of works. If target building owners and/or occupiers need more time to prepare for and carry out the improvement works, the FSD will consider their applications for extending the compliance period of the Directions in the light of the justifications they provided and/or the scale of works involved, etc. For the BD, upon the expiry of the Directions, the Department will take follow-up actions in accordance with the situation of the cases. If target building owners and/or occupiers disregard the Directions, the BD will issue warning letter to the relevant owners and/or occupiers.

If owners and/or occupiers, without reasonable excuse, do not comply with the Directions, the EAs may apply to the Magistrate for a FSCO, ordering them to comply with the requirements of the FSCO. If the owners and/or occupiers of the target buildings do not comply with the Directions or the FSCOs without reasonable excuse, the EAs will consider instigating prosecution against the relevant owners and/or occupiers.

In addition, the FSD will take a risk-based approach in handling fire safety of old buildings and give priority to old buildings with relatively higher fire risk, such as those with higher building age, those without FSIs, building with single-staircase design, and "three-nil" building, etc. After Directions are issued to owners, the FSD will also render full assistance to owners for complying with the Directions, for example, sending representatives to attend owners' meetings to explain the requirements of the Ordinance, as well as proactively approaching works consultants or registered fire service installation contractors to render appropriate assistance and offer advice. If the owners do not comply with Directions proactively, the FSD will take resolute enforcement action and instigate prosecution against the relevant owners. On the other hand, the BD has all along improved the compliance status for Directions from various aspects. Taking prosecution as an example, the BD established the Fast Track Prosecution Unit in 2021

through internal redeployment of resources to step up prosecution effort against owners who had not complied with Directions. The BD will conduct inspection and will take enforcement actions resolutely if it is confirmed that there is non-compliance situation and the owners do not have reasonable excuse. The BD will re-prioritise its enforcement and prosecution actions, focus resources for handling high fire risk buildings such as single-staircase buildings, those with more guesthouses or subdivided units, and those with non-complied Mandatory Building Inspection Scheme notices and have yet to appoint a registered inspector, and streamline the procedures and deploy manpower to expedite prosecution work. The Security Bureau and the FSD will also join the collaboration platform established by the Development Bureau last year, members comprising the BD, the Home Affairs Department and the Urban Renewal Authority (URA). The aim is to pay more attention on assisting owners' corporations and owners in complying with Directions by strengthening co-ordination among all parties concerned in case management and enhancing public education on the district level.

In addition, as mentioned above, we are stepping up the work on amending the Ordinance to empower the FSD and the BD to carry out fire safety improvement works for owners who have failed to comply with the requirements of the Ordinance. On the premise of not compromising the principle that timely and proper maintenance of private buildings is the responsibility of owners, amending the Ordinance and putting forward the defaulted works mechanism will enable owners with genuine needs to obtain assistance from the Government for the timely compliance of the relevant Directions. Moreover, the legislative amendment proposals also include different elements, such as increasing the penalties for non-compliance with Directions or FSCO, introducing provisions preventing any person from obstructing an owners' corporation in complying with the requirements of the Ordinance, empowering the EAs to register Directions issued against the involved buildings or their relevant parts in the Land Registry, etc. The aforementioned elements will strengthen the deterrent effect, encourage owners to comply with the requirement of the Ordinance, so that the relevant Directions could be complied with in a timely manner.

On top of all of the above, the Government will continue to proactively provide various kinds of support (including support on financial, co-ordination among owners as well as technical (please refer to part 5 below for details) to assist owners in carrying out fire safety improvement works with a view to enhancing the compliance rate of the Ordinance.

(4) To assist owners of old buildings in complying with the requirements of the Ordinance, the Government, in partnership with the URA, implemented a \$2 billion Fire Safety Improvement Works Subsidy Scheme (FSWS) in 2018, providing subsidies for carrying out fire safety improvement works. Subsequently, the Government increased the funding for the FSWS to a total of \$5.5 billion. In 2018 and 2020, the URA rolled out 2 rounds of applications. Since then, the URA launched the third round of application from April to September 2023, to assist more owners in need to enhance the fire safety standard of their buildings.

There were 2 249 and 734 applications meeting the basic application requirements in the first and second rounds of the FSWS applications respectively. The URA issued letters of Approval-in-principle to the applicants of the above 2 983 applications, and contacted them about the commencement of fire safety improvement works. For the third round, the URA received 1 307 applications meeting the basic application requirements. The URA is processing the applications and will issue to the applicants letters of Approval-in-principle in due course.

(5) With the rapid development of technology, we will continue to make better use of technology, proactively exploring the use of technology in various aspects to enhance fire safety. For target buildings, the EAs understand that individual target buildings may encounter difficulties in complying with the requirements of Directions due to their structural or spatial constraints or other reasons. The FSD has been in close co-operation with the Water Services Department and have put in place an array of facilitation measures, including "improvised hose reel systems (direct-feed type)" which allows buildings of three or fewer storeys to have their fire services systems operating on direct water supply from government mains (commonly known as town mains). After that, in July 2023, the FSD further introduced the improvised hose reel system (direct pumping design) and improvised fire hydrant/hose reel system (direct pumping design) for which the connection of fixed fire pumps to government mains is allowed for target buildings of four storeys or more storeys so that the installation of fire service water tank is not required, subject to the conditions that no contamination will be caused to the fresh water supply system and measures against unlawful water consumption are in place. These measures aim to assist target buildings in overcoming difficulties arising from technical or spatial constraints.

The BD is planning to develop an electronic inspection platform for its staff to use tablets to conduct inspections and record the building conditions in real time, so as to simplify the process of preparation of inspection reports with a view to enhancing the effectiveness of enforcement action.

The EAs will continue to explore how to make use of technology to overcome difficulties encountered by target building owners in complying with the requirements of the Ordinance, so as to enhance the compliance rate of the Ordinance.

Note: If owners or occupiers do not comply with the Directions within a reasonable timeframe and fail to provide reasonable justifications, the EAs may apply to the Magistrate for a FSCO, ordering them to comply with the requirements of the FSCO. If they do not comply with the Directions or the FSCOs, they shall be guilty of an offence and are liable to a fine.

LCQ12: Regulation of health food products

Following is a question by the Hon Chan Hok-fung and a written reply by the Secretary for Health, Professor Lo Chung-mau, in the Legislative Council today (April 24):

Question:

It has been reported that as at the 29th of last month, five people in Japan had died after consuming health food products containing red fermented rice. Regarding the regulation of health food products, will the Government inform this Council:

(1) of the legislation currently in place to regulate health food products and nutrition supplements containing Chinese medicines, western medicines, and ingredients other than such two types of medicines, and which government departments are responsible for the related investigations and enforcement actions;

(2) whether it has compiled comprehensive statistics on the types and numbers of health food products which members of the public currently can purchase in the market and import through the Internet; if so, of the details;

(3) whether it received cases of health hazards caused by the consumption of health food products in the past five years; if so, of the number of such cases and their details, including the hazards caused and the organs affected; and

(4) given that the Government will establish the Hong Kong Centre for Medical Products Regulation to help restructure and strengthen the regimes for regulating, vetting and approving medicines (including Chinese medicines and western medicines), whether health food products will be subject to the Centre's vetting and approval in future; if so, of the details and timetable?

Reply:

President,

The Government has been keeping in view the recent incidents involving deaths after consumption of products containing red fermented rice in Japan. Red fermented rice is produced by fermenting steamed rice with a strain of red yeast fungus, and has been used in Asia as a food colourant, flavor enhancer, for meat preservation and wine brewing. During fermentation, red fermented rice could produce lovastatin, a chemical similar to cholesterol-lowering pharmaceutical substance. However, the level of lovastatin in ordinary conventional foods containing red fermented rice is very low under normal application, and normal consumption of these foods does not pose any health risk. Although the Japanese authorities are still investigating the recent incidents, according to the latest information released by the

Ministry of Health, Labour and Welfare of Japan, the red fermented rice ingredient involved was found to contain an unintended ingredient, namely puberulic acid, which is not derived from the normal process of red fermented rice production, and the relevant authorities of Japan are investigating whether there is any causal relationship between the unintended ingredient and the occurrence of kidney disorders and deaths after consumption of these products.

The relevant products are not registered drugs nor regulated as pharmaceutical products in Japan. The products have not been marketed by the relevant company in Hong Kong. Considering that red fermented rice is widely used in food, in 2019, the Pharmacy and Poisons Board of Hong Kong (the Board), after making reference to the practices of other drug regulatory authorities, decided that products containing lovastatin with a daily dose of about 10 milligrams or more would be regarded as pharmaceutical product, which shall be registered by the Board before they can be sold or distributed in Hong Kong. According to the record, there is no registered pharmaceutical product in Hong Kong containing red fermented rice as active ingredient.

In consultation with the Environmental and Ecology Bureau, the Commerce and Economic Development Bureau, the Department of Health (DH) and the Hospital Authority, the reply to the question raised by the Hon Chan Hok-fung is as follows:

(1) The international community has no consistent definition and regulation of "health food products". Broadly speaking, such products may contain different names, e.g. dietary supplements, nutraceuticals, natural health products. The Government has been adopting a multi-pronged strategy in regulating these products. In Hong Kong, depending on their individual nature, composition, content of the claims made, usage, dosage, packaging specifications, etc, such products are regulated under different legislations and respective government departments, including the Pharmacy and Poisons Ordinance (PPO) (Cap. 138), the Chinese Medicine Ordinance (CMO) (Cap. 549), the Undesirable Medical Advertisements Ordinance (Cap. 231), the Trade Descriptions Ordinance (TDO) (Cap. 362) and the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance (Cap. 132).

Product that falls within the definition of pharmaceutical product under the PPO and proprietary Chinese medicine (pCm) under the CMO must comply with the respective regulatory requirements for safety, quality and efficacy and be registered before they can be sold and supplied in Hong Kong. The PPO and the CMO also stipulate the licensing and practicing requirements for drug dealers. The DH has a market surveillance mechanism in place to monitor the safety, efficacy and quality of drugs. To protect the public from being induced by medical or health claims and thereby seeking improper self-medication that may result in delay in seeking medical treatment, the Government also regulates the labelling and promotion of products with medical or health claims (including products that are not pharmaceutical product or pCm) through the Undesirable Medical Advertisements Ordinance. The Customs and Excise Department (C&ED), as the principal enforcement agency of the TDO, will take enforcement actions against unfair trade practices (including false trade descriptions) prohibited under the TDO.

As for food in general, it is regulated under relevant provisions of the Public Health and Municipal Services Ordinance. The Centre for Food Safety under the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department, as the enforcement agency, carries out relevant work to ensure that relevant food is fit for human consumption, and is in compliance with relevant food safety standards and food labelling requirements. The relevant requirements also apply to those "health food products" which fall within the definition of "food".

In addition, the claims of "health food products" in licensed broadcasting services are also subject to regulation by the relevant provisions or codes under the Broadcasting Ordinance (Cap. 562) and the Broadcasting (Miscellaneous Provisions) Ordinance (Cap. 391). The Communications Authority will continue to take enforcement and regulatory actions in accordance with the relevant provisions and codes.

Different regions have adopted various practices as to whether to adopt more specific regulatory regimes for "health food products". Indeed, the nature and risks associated with different types of "health food products" also differ. The Government will continue to closely monitor the latest international regulatory developments and the market situation for "health food products", conduct risk assessment and review the relevant legislation and regulatory arrangements in a timely manner. At this stage, the Health Bureau is of the view that, from risk perspective, the safety of the products concerned has already been appropriately regulated under the prevailing framework, and that it would be more appropriate to strengthen relevant public education and publicity as well as the provision of information than to directly regulate the health claims of "health food products".

(2) and (3) The DH has been monitoring the safety, efficacy and quality of drugs through an established market surveillance mechanism. The DH collects samples of products in the market from various channels (including the Internet) for drug-related testing. If a product is found to have failed to comply with relevant statutory requirements (such as not registered, or found to have quality defects or adulterated with harmful substances), the DH will issue a press release as soon as possible to safeguard public health. Upon receipt of reports of suspected contravention of drug-related offences, including suspected illegal sale or possession of unregistered pharmaceutical products or pCm, the DH will follow up the cases immediately. If there is any contravention of drug-related offences found, the DH will take enforcement action and will conduct joint enforcement operations with the C&ED or the Hong Kong Police Force, or refer the cases to other law enforcement departments for follow-up actions.

In the past five years (from 2019 to 2023), the DH conducted about 41 370 inspections against Authorised Sellers of Poisons (commonly known as pharmacies) and Listed Sellers of Poisons (commonly known as medicine stores), and about 23 570 test purchase operations. In addition, the DH also conducted a total of about 28 590 inspections against licensed Chinese herbal medicines retailers. During the same period, the DH handled 137 conviction cases involving unregistered pharmaceutical products, with the highest penalty of imprisonment of 10 months or a fine of up to HK\$75,000. There were also seven cases involving unregistered pCm, and the maximum fine was

HK\$10,000. The above 137 convictions included four cases in which the products claimed to be "health food products" were actually found to contain controlled drug ingredients.

In addition, the DH has also established a surveillance mechanism against online sales platforms and social media platforms. In the past five years, the DH has detected about 16 680 Internet links that might involve suspected illegal sale of controlled drugs, and about 330 Internet links involved in suspected illegal sale of unregistered pCm in the Internet. The relevant platforms have removed the problematic links as requested by the DH.

Other relevant bureaux and departments do not keep the information mentioned in the question.

(4) It is announced in "The Chief Executive's 2023 Policy Address" that the Government will enhance the current evaluation and registration mechanism for drugs, and establish an internationally renowned regulatory authority of drugs and medical devices, to progress towards the primary evaluation of applications of new drugs and medical devices.

The Government will set up a preparatory office under the DH in the first half of 2024 to review the current regulatory function within the DH including Chinese medicines, western medicines and medical devices, study the restructuring and strengthening of the regulatory and approval regimes for drugs, medical devices and medical technology and put forward proposals and steps for the establishment of the Hong Kong Centre for Medical Products Regulation (CMPR). The CMPR will adopt the primary evaluation approach in approval of registration applications of new drugs and medical devices under relevant legislations regulating Chinese medicines, western medicines and medical devices, with a view to attracting more local, Mainland and overseas pharmaceutical and medical device enterprises to conduct research and development and clinical trials in Hong Kong.

"Health food products" that are not classified as drugs and medical devices will continue to be regulated in accordance with other legislations and arrangements currently applicable to them.

LCQ4: Manpower of dentists

Following is a question by the Hon Michael Tien and a written reply by the Secretary for Health, Professor Lo Chung-mau, in the Legislative Council today (April 24):

Question:

In a discussion paper on "Proposed Amendments to the Dentists Registration Ordinance (Cap. 156)" submitted on July 14 last year to the

Panel on Health Services of this Council, the Government pointed out that Hong Kong had been facing a shortage of dentists, with only approximately 0.37 dentists per 1 000 population as at end 2022, lagging behind other countries; and according to the manpower projections for healthcare professionals conducted by the Government in 2020, the shortage of dentists in Hong Kong might persist till 2035. The Government indicated in January this year that it would introduce the amendment bill to the Dentists Registration Ordinance (Cap. 156) into this Council in the first half of this year to provide new pathways for admission of qualified non-locally trained dentists for serving in specified institutions. In this connection, will the Government inform this Council:

- (1) of the long-term target number set for locally trained dentists;
- (2) whether it has assessed the numbers of dentists per 1 000 population in Hong Kong in 2035, 2040 and 2045; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that; and
- (3) given that the Faculty of Dentistry at the University of Hong Kong is currently the only institution in Hong Kong that provides Bachelor of Dental Surgery programme, whether the Government has considered establishing a new dental school to increase the manpower of local dentists in the long run; if so, of the details; if not, the reasons for that?

Reply:

President,

In response to the various parts of the Member's question, the consolidated reply are as follows:

The Government's policy objective in healthcare manpower is to ensure a stable supply of healthcare manpower to meet the expected demand for healthcare services in Hong Kong. The Government carries out healthcare manpower projection on a triennial basis to project the manpower need required to fulfil service demands. The Government assesses the manpower target of different healthcare professions based on the projection result, rather than solely considering the healthcare profession to population ratio.

Dentists' manpower

For dentists, Hong Kong has a total of 2 876 registered dentists as at end December 2023. The dentist per 1 000 population is around 0.37. According to the Healthcare Manpower Projection 2020, the shortfall of dentist manpower was projected to be 115 and 102 in 2030 and 2035 respectively. The shortfall was expected to persist until 2040 before easing slightly. To increase dentist manpower, the Government increased the number of University Grants Committee (UGC)-funded first-year-first-degree places of the Bachelor of Dental Surgery programme on four occasions. The number increased from 50 in the 2009/10 academic year to 90 in the 2024/25 academic year, representing an increase of 80 per cent.

Enhancing manpower resources for dental profession

To safeguard the oral health of the public, the Government established the Working Group on Oral Health and Dental Care (the Working Group) in end 2022 to review the policy objectives, implementation strategies, service scopes and delivery models of oral health and dental care. The Working Group released an interim report in December 2023, recommending the Government to develop primary dental care services appropriate for different age groups by focusing on prevention of dental diseases, making use of the capacity of ancillary dental workers to complement to overall development need of primary dental care services. Another recommendation is to strengthen manpower supply of dental professionals. Specific measures include providing new pathways for admitting qualified non-locally trained dentists to alleviate their shortage, and enhancing training for ancillary dental workers to enable them to take on a greater role in primary dental care services.

To complement the development of oral health and dental care, the Government must take necessary measures to alleviate the existing manpower shortage of dental professions. Given the lead time required for training local dentists, as well as the practical constraints in expanding the teaching manpower and facilities, the Government cannot solely rely on increasing the number of local training places to address the imminent manpower shortage, particularly the acute shortage of dentists in the public sector. The Government introduced the Dentists Registration (Amendment) Bill 2024 (the Bill) into the Legislative Council to provide new pathways for the admission of qualified non-locally trained dentists to practise in specified institutions under the premise that the professional standards and patients' welfare are maintained.

At the same time, based on the risk-based principle, the Bill also suitably adjusts the areas of practice of ancillary dental workers, and introduces a statutory registration regime for both dental hygienists and dental therapists under the regulatory control of the Dental Council of Hong Kong (DCHK) while retitling ancillary dental workers as dental care professionals, with a view to recognising their professional status and ensuring patients' safety and service quality. According to information from the DCHK and the Department of Health (DH), there are a total of 613 registered dental hygienists and 237 dental therapists employed by Government as at February 2024. To enhance training for local ancillary dental workers, the training places of dental hygienists and dental therapists will be increased by the Government to nearly double from 95 in the 2023/24 academic year to 185 in the 2024/25 academic year. The DH will provide full tuition sponsorship to students studying the dental hygienist and dental therapist programmes starting from 2023/24 academic year in order to attract more individuals to join the industry.

The Health Bureau has earlier launched a new round of healthcare manpower projection to tie in with the planning exercise for the 2025-28 triennium of the UGC. Subject to the projection results, the Government will review the strategies for local healthcare manpower development and consider the need to further adjust the number of healthcare training places in the next triennium of UGC, as well as exploring long-term measures for the training of healthcare professionals. The Government currently has no plan to

set up a second dental school, which involves important policy considerations and substantial funding, while not being able to alleviate the shortage of dentists within a short period of time.

The Government will continue to keep in view the community's demand for dental care services and manpower situation of the profession, and suitably adjust the strategy to ensure the supply of dentists and ancillary dental workers, including the regular planning of training places based on manpower projection.

Inspection of aquatic products imported from Japan

In response to the Japanese Government's plan to discharge nuclear-contaminated water at the Fukushima Nuclear Power Station, the Director of Food and Environmental Hygiene issued a Food Safety Order which prohibits all aquatic products, sea salt and seaweeds originating from the 10 metropolis/prefectures, namely Tokyo, Fukushima, Ibaraki, Miyagi, Chiba, Gunma, Tochigi, Niigata, Nagano and Saitama, from being imported into and supplied in Hong Kong.

For other Japanese aquatic products, sea salt and seaweeds that are not prohibited from being imported into Hong Kong, the Centre for Food Safety (CFS) of the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department will conduct comprehensive radiological tests to verify that the radiation levels of these products do not exceed the guideline levels before they are allowed to be supplied in the market.

As the discharge of nuclear-contaminated water is unprecedented and will continue for 30 years or more, the Government will closely monitor and step up the testing arrangements. Should anomalies be detected, the Government does not preclude further tightening the scope of the import ban.

From noon on April 23 to noon today (April 24), the CFS conducted tests on the radiological levels of 254 food samples imported from Japan, which were of the "aquatic and related products, seaweeds and sea salt" category. No sample was found to have exceeded the safety limit. Details can be found on the CFS's thematic website titled "Control Measures on Foods Imported from Japan" (www.cfs.gov.hk/english/programme/programme_rafs/programme_rafs_fc_01_30_Nuclear_Event_and_Food_Safety.html).

In parallel, the Agriculture, Fisheries and Conservation Department (AFCD) has also tested 50 samples of local catch for radiological levels. All the samples passed the tests. Details can be found on the AFCD's website

(www.afcd.gov.hk/english/fisheries/Radiological_testing/Radiological_Test.html).

The Hong Kong Observatory (HKO) has also enhanced the environmental monitoring of the local waters. No anomaly has been detected so far. For details, please refer to the HKO's website (www.hko.gov.hk/en/radiation/monitoring/seawater.html).

From August 24 to noon today, the CFS and the AFCD have conducted tests on the radiological levels of 45 439 samples of food imported from Japan (including 29 735 samples of aquatic and related products, seaweeds and sea salt) and 12 082 samples of local catch respectively. All the samples passed the tests.

[Auction of traditional vehicle registration marks to be held on May 12](#)

The Transport Department (TD) today (April 24) announced that the auction of traditional vehicle registration marks will be held on May 12 (Sunday) in Meeting Room N101, L1, New Wing, Hong Kong Convention and Exhibition Centre, Wan Chai.

"A total of 350 vehicle registration marks will be put up for public auction. The list of marks has been uploaded to the department's website, www.td.gov.hk/en/public_services/vehicle_registration_mark/index.html," a department spokesman said.

Applicants who have paid a deposit of \$1,000 to reserve a mark for auction should also participate in the bidding (including the first bid at the reserve price of \$1,000). Otherwise, the mark concerned may be sold to another bidder at the reserve price.

People who wish to participate in the bidding at the auction should take note of the following important points:

- (1) Successful bidders are required to produce the following documents for completion of registration and payment procedures immediately after the successful bidding:
 - (i) the identity document of the successful bidder;
 - (ii) the identity document of the purchaser if it is different from the successful bidder;
 - (iii) a copy of the Certificate of Incorporation if the purchaser is a body corporate; and
 - (iv) a crossed cheque made payable to "The Government of the Hong Kong

Special Administrative Region" or "The Government of the HKSAR". (For an auctioned mark paid for by cheque, the first three working days after the date of auction will be required for cheque clearance confirmation before processing of the application for mark assignment can be completed.) Successful bidders can also pay through the Easy Pay System (EPS). Payment by post-dated cheques, cash or other methods will not be accepted.

(2) Purchasers must make payment of the purchase price through EPS or by crossed cheque and complete the Memorandum of Sale of Registration Mark immediately after the bidding. Subsequent alteration of the particulars in the memorandum will not be permitted.

(3) A vehicle registration mark can only be assigned to a motor vehicle which is registered in the name of the purchaser. The Certificate of Incorporation must be produced immediately by the purchaser if a vehicle registration mark purchased is to be registered under the name of a body corporate.

(4) Special registration marks are non-transferable. Where the ownership of a motor vehicle with a special registration mark is transferred, the allocation of the special registration mark shall be cancelled.

(5) The purchaser shall, within 12 months after the date of auction, apply to the Commissioner for Transport for the registration mark to be assigned to a motor vehicle registered in the name of the purchaser. If the purchaser fails to assign the registration mark within 12 months, allocation of the mark will be cancelled and arranged for re-allocation in accordance with the statutory provision without prior notice to the purchaser.

For other auction details, please refer to the Guidance Notes – Auction of Traditional Vehicle Registration Marks, which can be downloaded from the department's website, www.td.gov.hk/en/public_services/vehicle_registration_mark/tvrm_auction/index.html.