

Extension of application deadline of Squatter Occupants Voluntary Registration Scheme

The Lands Department (LandsD) announced today (October 22) the extension of the application deadline of the Squatter Occupants Voluntary Registration Scheme for one year, from October 31, 2020, to October 31, 2021.

Launched on November 1, 2018, the Scheme is a one-off exercise to complement the government initiative announced on May 10, 2018, to enhance the ex-gratia compensation and rehousing arrangements for persons residing in squatter structures affected by the Government's development clearance exercises. Specifically, for persons residing in licenced non-domestic structures or in squatter structures recorded for non-domestic uses in the 1982 Squatter Control Survey (hereinafter collectively referred to as "non-domestic squatter structures"), subject to their registration with the LandsD under the Scheme, they will fulfil the basic eligibility requirement on applying for rehousing and ex-gratia allowances if their non-domestic squatter structures are cleared in the Government's development clearance exercises in future.

A spokesperson for the LandsD remarked that non-domestic squatter structures should not be used for domestic purposes. The Scheme aims to establish a register to record those households who have already lived in non-domestic squatter structures, so that they have the opportunity to apply for rehousing arrangements and ex-gratia allowances if they are affected by the Government's future development clearance exercises. The Scheme also seeks to discourage others from moving into and residing in non-domestic squatter structures as well as to curb related speculative activities.

Taking into consideration that grass-roots households may not be well aware of the Scheme's objectives, and that the Government's publicity has been affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the department has decided to extend the application deadline.

In parallel, the LandsD also announced the relaxation of the registration criteria to better achieve the Scheme's objectives. A person would be eligible for registration under the Scheme if he or she can prove continued residence in a non-domestic squatter structure since May 10, 2018, or before (i.e. the date on which the enhanced ex-gratia compensation and rehousing arrangements were announced by the Government). Prior to this relaxation, only those applicants who demonstrated their continued residence in those structures since May 10, 2016, or before would be eligible for registration under the Scheme.

"For those who have applied for registration under the Scheme and satisfied its registration criteria, a change of use of their squatter

structures for domestic purposes will not trigger enforcement actions by the LandsD. However, the structures concerned are still required to comply with other requirements governing the licenced or surveyed squatter structures under the relevant licences and/or the prevailing squatter control policy, including the prohibition against any extension or addition, as well as unauthorised alteration," the spokesperson stressed.

Guidance notes on the Scheme and application forms can now be downloaded from the LandsD's website (www.landsd.gov.hk/en/vrs/vrs.htm), and will be made available from November at District Lands Offices, Clearance Offices and Squatter Control Offices of the LandsD, and at Home Affairs Enquiry Centres of the Home Affairs Department. For enquiries, please call 2231 3392 or email vrs-cu@landsd.gov.hk.