

FEHD to hold another webinar for funeral business sectors to assist next of kin to handle bodies of deceased as soon as possible

The Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) has been making every effort in assisting the funeral business sectors and the next of kin to handle the after-death arrangements for the deceased as early as possible through initiatives such as enhancing cremation services and co-ordinating the supply of coffins. The FEHD will hold the fourth webinar tomorrow (April 29) to discuss with funeral business sectors on integration of resources and services for this purpose.

Three webinars were organised by the FEHD in March, namely to refresh practitioners' memories on the guidelines in Precautions for Handling and Disposal of Dead Bodies, issued by the Government in February 2020, to exchange views on rationalising the workflow and shortening the time required for the handling of after-death arrangements, and to invite a specialist in clinical microbiology and infection to elaborate on the precautionary measures and points warranting attention on the handling of dead bodies. The fourth webinar to be held tomorrow will focus on exploring ways to integrate existing resources and services with a view to assisting the next of kin to make early funeral arrangements of the deceased. The video recording of the webinar will be uploaded onto the FEHD's webpage for reference.

According to statistics of the FEHD, as at April 27, among the around 1 900 bodies stored at the body storage facility in Fu Shan, Sha Tin, around 94 per cent have been cremated, have cremation sessions booked on or before May 17, or have completed payments with cremation sessions to be booked. Another 3 per cent have completed or are arranging coffin burials, or have departed from Hong Kong. According to the information of the Department of Health (DH), for the remaining 60 bodies or so, the identification procedures have been completed, and the DH has called the next of kin of the deceased again and appealed to them to collect the dead bodies as soon as possible for handling the after-death arrangements.

A spokesman for the FEHD said that there are still sufficient cremation sessions available for booking at present, and appealed to the next of kin to make good use of cremation services as far as practicable to arrange after-death arrangements of the deceased early.

With the advent of the fifth wave of the pandemic, the FEHD has proactively increased the daily cremation sessions available for booking since February to cope with the significant increase in demand for cremation services. With the advanced commissioning of the two new cremators at Wo Hop Shek Crematorium, the number of daily cremation sessions has been maintained at over 300 since early April. All crematoria have been in operation almost

round-the-clock, except for the Cheung Chau Crematorium which has had very low utilisation. The cremation dates available on the booking system have been extended from the next 15 days to the next 20 days to ensure sufficient sessions are available for booking.

To further enhance the efficiency of handling cremation applications, the service hours of the Hong Kong Island Joint Office and Kowloon Joint Office have been extended since March 25. The FEHD has also launched the Online Cremation Application and Pre-paid System 2.0 on April 1 to facilitate members of the public and licensed undertakers in printing out the application form for cremation service and making advanced payment for cremation online once inputting the required information through the system. The FEHD has also set up a designated service counter at the Kowloon Joint Office for handling applications through the online system. The processing time for individual cremation applications has thus been greatly reduced by around 80 per cent.

The FEHD again urged the funeral trade to accord priority to the handling of the bodies kept in the storage facility, and also appealed to the next of kin to collect the bodies of their deceased family members early to make funeral arrangements. The FEHD has approached the seven licensed funeral parlours again yesterday (April 27) and learned that around 43 per cent of service hall sessions are available for booking during weekdays in early May, while about 20 per cent of service hall sessions are available for booking during weekends and public holidays.

The FEHD thanks the Tung Wah Group of Hospitals (TWGH) for its response to the FEHD's appeal that from yesterday onwards, it will regularly make public through its service website (funeralservices.tungwahcsd.org/?_lang=en) the number of service halls available for booking in the coming 30 days at its three funeral parlours. In addition, the TWGH has also extended its arrangement to open three service halls at its Global Funeral Parlour for use by the funeral trade free of charge for holding daytime funeral ceremonies without staying for the overnight session till May 31.