

First conviction for operating an illegal private columbarium

A 69-year-old man was convicted of illegally operating a private columbarium, contravening the Private Columbaria Ordinance, by the Kowloon City Magistrates' Courts on May 16. He was fined, with a criminal record registered. This is the first conviction for illegally operating a private columbarium since the commencement of the Ordinance.

A spokesman for the Food and Environmental Hygiene Department (FEHD) said today (May 17) that the Private Columbaria Affairs Office of the FEHD had earlier detected that a private columbarium in Cooke Street, Hung Hom, was suspected to have rented out niches without a licence under the Ordinance. An operation was thus mounted at the premises. The operator of the unlicensed private columbarium was arrested and prosecuted. At the trial, the operator was convicted of contravening the relevant provision of the Ordinance and was fined \$30,000 with a criminal record registered.

Under the Ordinance, any person who operates, keeps, manages or in any other way has control of a private columbarium other than under a licence commits an offence and is liable on summary conviction to a fine of \$2 million and imprisonment for three years; or on conviction on indictment to a fine of \$5 million and imprisonment for seven years.

A spokesman for the FEHD said, "This department will continue to take stringent enforcement action against illegally operated private columbaria. Members of the public should not buy or rent niches from any unlicensed private columbaria. If members of the public suspect any activities of illegally operating a private columbarium, they should immediately report it to the FEHD by calling hotline 2868 0000."